

# Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group Meeting 37

FINAL Meeting Record

9 October 2024

Thursday Island

Note all meeting papers and record available on  
the PZJA webpage: [www.pzja.gov.au](http://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 <b>Attachment A</b> .
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 Fisheries Research Development Council 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	<p>Traditional Inhabitant Member Kemer Kemer Meriam, TIB licence holder and runs an independent freezer facility on Erub Island. Board member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries.</p>
Charles David (joined the meeting at 1pm)	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkaigal	<p>Traditional Inhabitant Member Kulkaigal, TSRA Board Fisheries Advisory Committee and Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.</p>
Patrick Mooka	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda Maluilgal	<p>Traditional Inhabitant Member Guda Maluilgal. TIB licence holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries representative. TSRA Board member, and involved with CSIRO Climate Change and Fisheries Project.</p>
Jermaine Reuben	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluilgal	<p>Traditional Inhabitant Member Maluilgal, TIB licence holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.</p>

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Thomas Fujii	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalagal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalagal. 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.
Adam White (online)	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	QDAF Member	Apology
Natalie Couchman	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
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.
Brooke D'Alberto (online)	Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics and Sciences	Nil interests
Richard Takai	TIB fisher	TIB licence holder
James Ahmat	TIB fisher	TIB licence holder
Kevin Sabatino	TIB fisher	TIB licence holder
Graham Hirakawa	TIB fisher	TIB licence holder

# 1 Preliminaries

## Welcome and apologies

- The 37<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (the RAG) was held on Thursday Island and opened with a prayer at 8:35am on Tuesday 9 October 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 and observers introduced themselves. The Chair noted that the main purpose of the meeting was to review the results of testing the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR).

2. Participant tables at the start of this meeting record reflect attendance. The following apologies were received:
  - a) Jenny Keys, QDAF member;
  - b) Yen Loban, TSRA Board Fisheries Portfolio Member;
  - c) Joseph Posu, Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Fisheries Authority (NFA).

## Adoption of agenda

3. The RAG considered the draft agenda which was circulated to members on 5 September 2024. It was adopted without change by the RAG and is provided at **Attachment B**.
4. The TSRA member requested to have a private caucus meeting with the traditional inhabitant members at some point during the meeting.

## 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. The RAG members agreed that although industry members have a direct interest in the fishery, there was no direct conflict for members when providing advice on revisions to the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR) and as such no need for members to excuse themselves from the meeting.

## Actions arising

8. The RAG noted the progress and status of actions arising from previous RAG meetings (refer to Agenda paper 1), in particular:
  - a) That all action items relating to the work of the TRL RAG Data Sub-group would be removed from the RAG action item list and maintained in a separate list; and,
  - b) That Action Item 2 relating to sharing of PNG catch data with AFMA and CSIRO is also removed as this work is considered business as usual.

## Out of session correspondence

9. The RAG noted the out-of-session correspondence on RAG matters since the previous meeting.

## 2 Updates from members

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10. The RAG noted verbal updates provided by traditional inhabitant members, industry members and observers regarding the performance of the Torres Strait TRL Fishery during the 2023-24 fishing season, in particular:
- a) Significant sand incursions have been observed across the region which has impacted sea grass coverage.
  - b) There have been lots of observations of small crayfish, which correlates well with the relatively higher 2023 pre-season survey 0+ counts, however the overall catch/production for the season was low. Reports from the Queensland East Coast TRL Fishery indicated a greater spread of sizes of TRL rather than lots of larger ones and fewer small ones.
  - c) Fishers emphasised the difficult financial situation in the fishery. The price of logistics to transport live product has been prohibitive for most operators. They tried to minimise their freight costs by limiting live TRL catches and switching to tails that could be frozen and stored to reduce freight costs even though per kilogram prices were lower. It was stated that this model of operation was not financially viable for the larger TVH vessels (i.e. Cape Grafton) which stopped fishing early in the season. Both sectors chose not to fish, rather than to fish uneconomically which resulted in the lowest catch/production in recent history. Fuel prices were around \$3.70 per litre on most islands.
  - d) Economic conditions in the 2023-24 season dictated how or whether people are fishing, which has impacted the ratio of live product to tailed product. Overall no one was making reasonable profits.
  - e) TRL logistics have been slowly improving with more international freight options and a reduction in freight costs, excluding freight in the Torres Strait. There is a level of optimism that international market conditions will improve in general with Australian lobster product (excluding TRL) expected to be permitted back into Chinese markets. It was considered that this will create opportunities for other species (such as TRL) in other markets previously saturated with southern and western Australian rock lobster. The economic situation for 2025 is looking more positive.
11. The RAG noted updates from scientific members, in particular that:
- a) The 2024 TRL survey will be going ahead and is scheduled for 3-20 November. Industry and communities are encouraged to engage with the survey team. The results of the survey will be presented at TRLRAG 38 in December 2024.
  - b) The latest marine climate briefings indicate that sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the last year have been the hottest since 1979 and the summer SST forecasts indicate warm water (1 degree warmer than normal) with the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) declaring a La Nina watch. Dr Plaganyi and her team have published a paper on forecasting a summer of extremes that is now available.
  - c) An action from the 2023 RAG meeting called for CSIRO to circulate a TRL connectivity study from Indonesia. Dr Plaganyi summarised that TRL is a widely distributed species with regional differences and that populations in the Torres Strait, the Queensland East Coast and PNG are a single genetic stock. The study indicates there are fine-scale genetic differences with *Panulirus ornatus* populations in Indonesia and the rest of South East Asia. This suggests very limited connectivity between Australian and South East Asian lobsters in Indonesia/Lombok. This is the stock that is considered endangered. The status of the New Caledonian lobster stock remains uncertain and more data are

required. There is also some work underway to analyse lobsters from China, which will help to discern healthy populations from overfished ones.

- d) The identity of the pink lobsters that were queried in previous RAGs were confirmed to be the same species of *P. ornatus* but with a rare genetic mutation. RAG members were encouraged to submit any further evidence or samples.
- e) Dr Plaganyi recently attended the New Zealand Ecosystem Approaches to Fisheries Management case study workshop and presented on dynamic multispecies modelling (MICE).

12. The AFMA member provided a brief update on the following points.

- a) The AFMA compliance program has a current focus on late catch disposal record (CDR) reporting. A lack of timely and accurate catch reporting means less information to manage fisheries which can result in poorer and more conservative decisions.
- b) PNG cross-endorsed boats stopped fishing in July 2024, taking a total reported catch of 12.49 tonnes this year.
- c) Legislative amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985* are still in progress. It is expected that the PZJA will revisit them at their next meeting following upcoming elections.
- d) The Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARES) Fishery Status Reports for 2023 are to be released in the next month. There are no changes expected to the status of TRL (not overfished and overfishing not occurring).
- e) The TRL Fishery was granted a 10-year Wildlife Trade Operation List of Exempt Native Species approval in December 2023. This is due to the fishery's sustainable assessment, based on the very high standard of data, scientific input and management which the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). Other fisheries, such as the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery are coming under increasing scrutiny due to the international listing of some sea cucumber species. The RAG noted that reviewing and fine tuning the TRL Fishery Harvest Strategy (to be discussed under Agenda Item 3) is considered best practice, but that any substantial changes to management will likely trigger a re-assessment of the fishery by DCCEEW.

13. The TSRA member noted that the consultation process for the TRL traditional inhabitant sector quota allocation project is now complete. Every community was visited with the exception of Mabuig, due to "sorry business". The consultants leading the project are preparing their draft report, which is expected by the end of October and will be tabled at the next PZJA meeting.

14. The TSRA is also working to develop packages for the TIB sector which include fuel rebates, logistics/freight rebates and power usage rebates.

15. The QDAF member, PNG NFA or Malu Lamar permanent observers were not in attendance and so no updates were provided.

### 3 Revisions to the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR)

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16. In response to extenuating circumstances that have led to the application of ad-hoc adjustments to the eHCR over several seasons (with the multiplier based on TAC rather than catch), TRLRAG 32 recommended that formal revisions to the eHCR be investigated by the CSIRO. This recommendation was put forward because the average catch multiplier in the eHCR was considered an unreliable indicator when actual catches have been lower than expected due to

non-stock-related reasons (COVID and the Chinese market). Ongoing use of the ad-hoc adjustment would result in a ratcheting-down effect on the recommended biological catch (RBC) TAC over time.

17. As such, the RAG noted a presentation by Dr Eva Plaganyi on a range of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) tested options and meta rules to account for ongoing exceptional circumstances in the eHCR.
18. CSIRO's testing and analysis of potential amendments to the eHCR included changes to the average catch multiplier, changes to the number of recent years informing the slope of the indicator inputs, as well as additional constant-catch TAC value scenarios as per TRLRAG 35 feedback.
19. Testing was completed across four different operating models, each with 200 simulations (total of 800 simulations) with 20-year projections. They considered changing climate and environmental factors (for example, low recruitment or increased mortality due to a marine heat waves), uncertainty with discards and feedback from traditional inhabitants and industry members to be more precautionary in 'bad years', while also accounting for natural variability in the stock even in the absence of fishing pressure. Each simulation aimed to test the data inputs and management responses to ensure the stock didn't decline on average (i.e. stock was maintained around the target reference point (TRP)) and avoid certain risks (i.e. a less than 10 per cent risk of breaching the limit reference point (LRP)).
20. The four operating models were:
  - a) OM1 – most similar to the stock assessment but explicit on discarding, traditional take and implementation errors;
  - b) OM2 – more precautionary parameter estimates (e.g. stock recruitment relationship of  $h=0.6$ , poorer recruitment), larger survey observation error, larger implementation error;
  - c) OM3 – climate-linked model (natural mortality ( $M$ ) and growth depend on SST), discards also linked to SST; and
  - d) OM4 – climate-linked effect on recruitment (e.g. possible ENSO or other climate event) plus market shocks.
21. The RAG noted that the parts of the eHCR that work well were not being reviewed (e.g. weightings of survey and CPUE indices) and that the main objective was to revise the average catch multiplier. Testing alternative weightings of each of the data inputs has not been addressed in this round of MSE testing but can be considered as sensitivities (known as robustness testing).
22. After an initial screening that removed very high-risk options or options that did not perform well against the objectives of the TRL Harvest Strategy, a total of nine eHCR candidates remained, including constant-catch TAC scenarios. These were further narrowed to a reduced subset of eHCR candidates, each labelled with a nickname for simplicity.
23. RAG members further noted that when measuring performance of a given candidate, trade-offs are considered and optimised to meet the objectives e.g. providing the highest catch with acceptable levels of risk, including closure of the fishery, breaching the LRP and staying away from the LRP. Also noting that the TRL Harvest Strategy has safeguards in place that stipulate the LRP has to be breached two years in a row before a fishery closure to commercial fishing is triggered.
24. The first two eHCR candidates presented were nicknamed the 'turtle' and 'jellyfish'. The 'turtle' rule is considered the most similar to the default eHCR and simply changed the existing average catch multiplier value (which has been impacted by low total catches in recent years) with a new multiplier value that does not use actual average catch numbers. It also has low variability -



depending on whether the indicator slopes are trending up or down. The 'turtle' rule adjusts the (RBC) but will dampen inter-annual variability.

25. The results of both rules were re-tuned to avoid issues with external factors impacting the total catch (because the total catch is not a reliable indicator of stock status if markets are impacted). These two candidates can be more or less variable and are the simplest revisions to the default eHCR. Instead of using average catch as a multiplier, the rule was tested by setting a fine-tuned fixed number (informed by the long-term catch averages as well as the stock assessment RBC TACs that were output for each year from 2013-2019) so the catch
26. value has less of an impact. It was tested against a three-year (more variable) and five-year slope (more stable) and the results compared against a 20-year projection of future spawning biomass.
27. Under both the 'turtle' and 'jellyfish' options, biomass is still highly variable even with no fishing pressure over a five-year slope due to the population dynamics of the fishery.
28. The 'dolphin' candidate (or survey smart rule) is also like the default eHCR and the 'turtle' rule but includes extra multiplier term based on the results of the most recent pre-season 1+ index (which has a 70% weighting in the eHCR). In years when the pre-season 1+ index is low the RBC will come down, but provides a small bonus when the 1+ index is higher. This variation is not symmetrical though. The RBC can decrease by up to 40% in bad years, but in good years the 'bonus' is up to around 12%. This feature was included to address feedback from traditional inhabitant members to be more precautionary in poor years.
29. The 'dolphin' candidate also accounts for survey precision (e.g. variability in average survey index could be due to survey methods or spatial stock variability). A more precise survey index has a greater weighting versus downweighting a less precise survey estimate.
30. Depending on whether the indicator slopes are trending up or down, and the level of precision about how good or bad the current year's preseason survey 1+ index is, the dolphin rule will adjust the RBC more strongly up or down (more variable).
31. RAG members noted that the TRL Harvest Strategy also already has extra safeguards in place which say that if in any year the pre-season survey 1+ index is 1.25 or lower, it triggers a stock assessment.
32. The 'crab' rule (or A2 – asymmetrical rule) introduces an asymmetry parameter to the pre-season 1+ slope to ensure a greater decrease when the slope (over three years) is more negative, and vice versa. This means that it is more variable and will reduce the RBC more in poorer years.
33. In summary, based on the reduced subset of rules:
  - a) the best performing rule, tuned with the lowest risk was the smart survey 'dolphin' candidate using a multiplier value of 670. This rule provides a small bonus in good recruitment years while being more precautionary in poor recruitment years; and,
  - b) The 'turtle' rule is the simplest that also performs well. It uses a multiplier value of 600
34. The three-year slope version candidate rules was viewed as too variable when considered against objectives and was not considered further. This left the 'turtle' (less variable) and 'dolphin' (more variable) rules to be further discussed.
35. Noting that none of the options presented would result in a stock crash with any significant likelihood, RAG members were encouraged to think about the objectives for the eHCR and which of the presented rule may best suit the desired outcomes for the Fishery.

## Discussion

36. Some members queried whether adjusting the weightings of each of the eHCR data inputs had been considered. For example, shifting 5% of the weighting of the TIB CPUE index to the TVH CPUE index because of the market issues that have been experienced, or shifting 5% of the

weighting from the 0+ survey index to the 1+ survey index. However, the RAG noted that MSE testing had not been undertaken to review weightings of the inputs as these were already MSE tested initially and were performing well. It was noted that sensitivity tests or robustness tests could be run to examine this.

37. The traditional inhabitant member for Kulkalgal queried whether uncertainty in reported catches has been considered, and that the rule needed to ensure protection of the TRL stock, rather than generating maximum value or the highest TAC. Dr Plaganyi reminded members that the eHCR doesn't use a model approach but uses data directly from the survey and the fishery and has taken into account scenarios where catches are unreported, higher discarding as well as climate change impacts to be more precautionary. In its simplest form, the eHCR will reduce the RBC when the indicators are trending down and aims to keep the stock around the TRP, noting that the TRP and LRP are also more precautionary than most other fisheries. The TSRA member reiterated that traditional inhabitant members are not looking to increase the TAC, but to preserve the resource.
38. In response to a question as to why the TAC cannot just be set at 500 tonnes for the next five years, Dr Plaganyi explained that the risk with a constant-catch TAC is that in a poor year, the TAC may be too high and jeopardise the stock. In contrast, there may be lost opportunities in a good year. In order for a constant-catch TAC to be appropriately precautionary, it needs to be set at a more conservative level (i.e. 300 tonnes). If it is set too low, there is a risk of closing the fishery early once the TAC has been reached, or other consequences if the TAC were exceeded (e.g. impacts on WTO approvals). Further, setting a constant-catch TAC does not allow for any real time monitoring of the stock to identify any changes, which is likely to also impact WTO approvals. It is possible to have a constant catch TAC as a fall-back option, for example, if in exceptional circumstances a survey could not go ahead, but it would need to be set at a conservative level.
39. Noting that both the 'turtle' and the 'dolphin' rules allow more flexibility, without any further risk compared to the ad-hoc approach of recent years, they key trade-off between the two is the range of variability of TACs. Having regard to the objectives of the TRL Harvest Strategy, the 'dolphin' rule is considered to perform the best, although more variable (moderate) than the 'turtle', it doesn't limit opportunity when indicators are looking positive (good years), but it is more precautionary in poorer years. The 'turtle' rule, which is most similar to the ad-hoc eHCR has more of a dampening effect (less variable) which won't provide as great an opportunity in really good years, but also will provide more of a buffer in poor years. Both options will keep the stock away from the LRP and maintain the stock at the TRP.
40. The table below shows the RBC statistics for the 'turtle' rule and 'dolphin' rule using 800 simulations of 20-year projections. This is also illustrated in Figure 1 below.

	Median RBC (20 yr projection period)	50% of time RBC in range	80% of time RBC in range	minimum	maximum
Turtle rule	590t	538-637t	512-680t	300t	845t
Dolphin rule	624t	520-767t	432-912t	300t	1000t

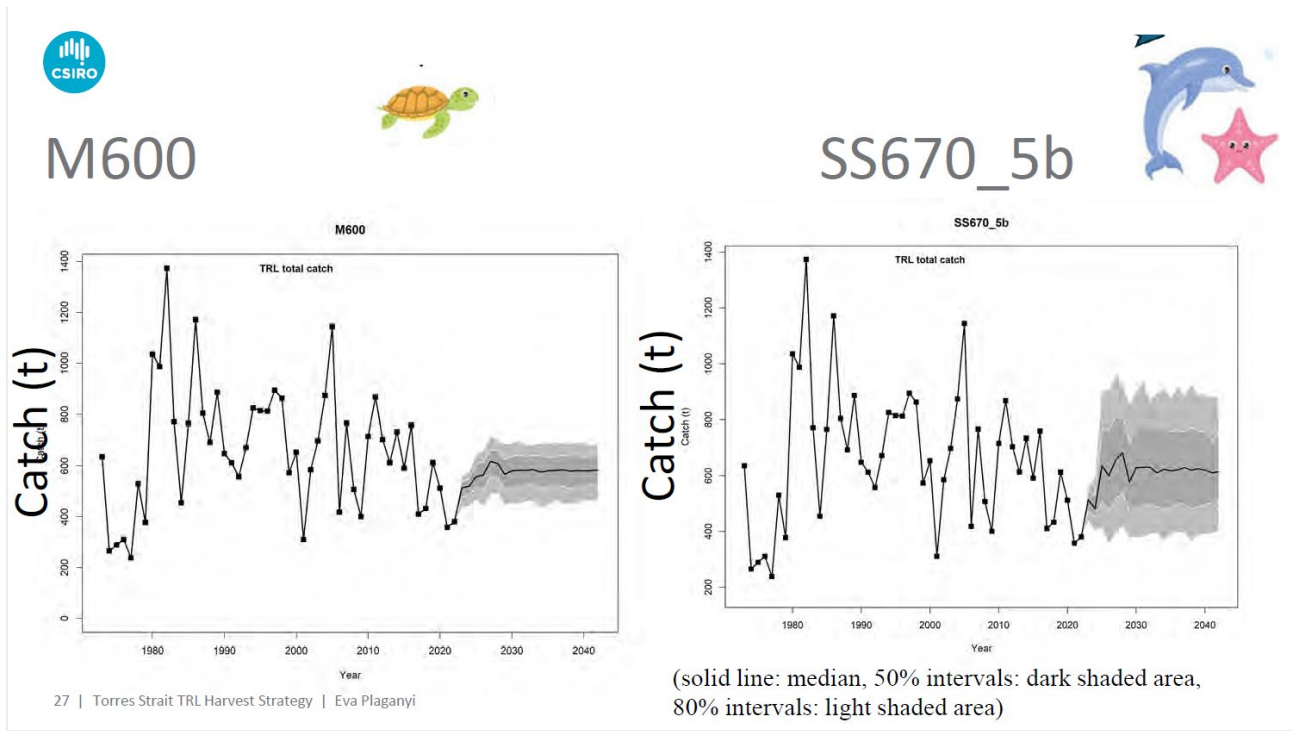






Figure 1. Comparison of 'turtle' and 'dolphin' rules with 20-year projections of RBC ranges

41. RAG members also noted a summary table of illustrative eHCR calculations where the various rules were applied retrospectively to the RBC calculations for 2023 (Figure 2).



## eHCR ILLUSTRATIVE CALCULATION (2023)

	eHCR (2023)	M600 candidate rule 	M619_3 candidate rule 	SS670_5b 	A2_619 
	Index_MY O; Seller; Int1	Index_MY O; Seller; Int1	Index_MY O; Seller; Int1 (3yr slope)	Index_MY O; Seller; Int1	Index_MY O; Seller; Int1
Preseas1	-0.1395	-0.1395	-0.326	-0.1395	-0.1395
Preseas0	0.0328	0.0328	0.701	0.0328	0.0328
CPUE_TIB	-0.0046	-0.0046	0.051	-0.0046	-0.0046
CPUE_TVH	0.0008	0.0008	0.218	0.0008	0.0008
SSmult				0.76	
TUNING PAR	585.0	600	619	670	619
<b>RBC (t)</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>508</b>

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Figure 2. Illustrative calculations of different eHCR rules applied to 2023 RBC.

42. The TSRA member stated that it is difficult to provide advice on the preferred option moving forward in the absence of the 2024 survey data. The RAG was reminded that the intention was to seek a recommendation on a process, not a specific TAC value and that doing so otherwise would be considered 'TAC shopping'.
43. The AFMA member noted that, as outlined in agenda paper 3b, the process for implementing the preferred option would be for the RAG at this meeting to recommend which option is preferred, which will then be applied and the outcomes of this considered at the December 2024 TRLRAG meeting. Formal approval from the PZJA to amend the TRL Harvest Strategy to incorporate the preferred option would then be sought in early 2025.
44. The TSRA member requested an opportunity for the traditional inhabitant members and observers to the RAG to hold a break-out caucus meeting during the afternoon tea break.
45. The Chair sought the views of the remaining RAG members:
- a) TVH industry members expressed a preference for the 'dolphin' rule as it is more responsive (to the survey count);
  - b) Either the 'turtle' or 'dolphin' rule were acceptable from AFMA's perspective as both options meet the objectives of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and the TRL Harvest Strategy;
  - c) The CSIRO scientific member noted that the best scientific advice taking into account feedback from RAG members is that the 'dolphin' rule would better meet the objectives, and was confident that either rule was suitably precautionary and performed well. Dr Plaganyi further expressed a preference that the eHCR is updated to a rule that is safer and more adaptable to current circumstances, and to not default to the ad-hoc adjustment of recent years.
  - d) The independent scientific member supported either the 'turtle' or 'dolphin' rule with no preference for one over the other.
  - e) The TSRA member also supported either the 'turtle' or 'dolphin' rule.
46. Traditional inhabitant members, with the support of TSRA expressed concern that more time was needed to consider the options and associated risks with changing from the current ad-hoc adjustment and what changes to the market might occur in the interim. Traditional inhabitant members were not comfortable in providing a view during the meeting.
47. The RAG agreed that TSRA would provide a single position on behalf of traditional inhabitant members, to be provided in writing after the RAG by close of business Friday 11 October 2024.
48. Following the RAG meeting, the RAG Chair and AFMA received a written statement submitted by TSRA on behalf of the traditional inhabitant members, (which also included the views of traditional inhabitant observers to the RAG meeting). The statement was then circulated to the other RAG members and reads as follows:

*I refer to Wednesday's TRLRAG 37 where a request was made to the TSRA to respond on behalf of the TIB members: Charles David, Thomas Fuji, Kevin Sabatino, Less Pitt, Patrick Mooka, Graham Hirakawa, Richard Takai, Jermaine Bowie, and James Ahmat.*

*After individual phone conversations with myself and each TIB member, followed by a group Teams meeting yesterday via the TSRA Fisheries office on TI, a unanimous decision has been reached by our TIB members NOT to change from the existing model, therefore, not supporting either of the Turtle, or Dolphin model as proposed for the 24-25 season. TSRA support this decision.*

*The members expressed many concerns around changing from the existing model and feel that there is no direct benefit to the TIB Industry, rather a risk that changing the model may cause an increase in the TAC which has been flagged as high risk to the TIB community. The following reasons were given for their decision:*

*1. Due to the lack of data around discard, mortalities, Traditional catch, and illegal activity, members feel that this is not reflected accurately in any proposed model therefore it potentially increases the risk of additional pressure on the resource. Localised stock depletion contradictory to current data is also of great concern and of high priority to the TIB community. A conservative approach towards preserving the stock by way of not encouraging any potential increase to the TAC has been agreed to and believe that the current model will best represent their view. TSRA supports this view.*

*2. The low TIB catch over the previous two years must be considered. This has occurred for several reasons including: TS market freeze on live TRL x 3 in the 2024 season, record low beach prices on offer to TIB fishers, and increasing record high fuel prices. While these factors directly contribute to a lack of participation by the TIB community, they are factors totally out of their control, as a result, there has been significant uncaught quota. TIB members all agreed that this is a preferable outcome for the sustainability of the resource and view this as a potential offset for the discrepancy in the lack of data on the above mentioned in point 1. The TIB members wish to continue with the current model to reflect this, even if it again results in further under caught. TSRA support this view.*

*3. The TIB community are currently in discussions around how best to utilise any under caught quota to benefit the broader TS community, should the situation arise in the future. The TIB members feel that given the fact that the current model recognises under caught, it is critical to keep this model until a decision is reached on how best to utilise this within the TS community. TSRA support this view.*

*While the TIB members have given their unanimous consensus, it has been asked of me on their behalf to sincerely thank SCIRO for a huge amount of hard work and recognise the direction that is proposed for the industry. They appreciate the multiple options for a model going forward, and there is a good chance one of the proposed models will suite the fishery at some point, however given the current state of ownership, the aspiration for 100% ownership, and the concerns around some of the data not yet incorporated into any model, they feel this will not benefit the TIB Industry, and it is not yet time to make the change to a new model. TSRA support this decision.*

*It is important to recognise the decision-making process from the TIB perspective. This is a huge decision that could potentially reshape the industry forever going forward, for better or for worse. Therefore, it deserves the time required to process and discuss the nuances of any proposal and this time frame should be offered to them to decide how long, and with whom. I feel this is a reminder to us all that the TIB members present are representatives of the TRL industry in their respective communities, not the decision makers, the community are in fact the decision makers. Acknowledgement and respect need to be shown to the ways of the Torres Strait decision-making culture.*

*In closing, the TIB members have requested a review of the model in 12 months from now, where they have the time to discuss with the broader community and see how the other models respond over the 24-25 season. TSRA support this request.*

49. Noting the differing views of RAG members, consensus on a way forward in amending the eHCR to be applied at TRLRAG 38 when provided advice on a recommended biological catch for the 2024-25 season and beyond was not reached.

## 4 Other business

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50. AFMA sought advice from RAG members regarding the start of season TAC. As per the original TRLRAG 24 advice (October 2018), the RAG recommended that the start of season 200 tonnes TAC should only be overridden;
- a) in seasons where the TRL stock abundance is exceptionally low and the final RBC is likely to fall below the start of season catch limit; or
  - b) by the TRL Harvest Strategy decision rules.
51. RAG members agreed that as per previous seasons, there is no evidence to indicate that the 200 tonnes starting TAC should be reviewed this coming season.

## 5 Date and venue for next meeting

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52. RAG members noted the next RAG meeting is scheduled for 10-11 December 2024 at the TSRA Board Room (Torres Haus), Thursday Island.
53. The meeting was closed in prayer at 3:11pm on Tuesday 9 October 2024.

**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:**

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 37  
(TRLRAG 37)**

Wednesday 9 October 2024 | 830am – 3pm

**Thursday Island Neighbourhood & Community Centre  
156 Douglas Street, Thursday Island**

**ADOPTED AGENDA**

**1 PRELIMINARIES**

**Welcome and apologies**

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 37<sup>th</sup> meeting of the RAG.

**Adoption of agenda**

The RAG will be invited to adopt the draft agenda.

**Actions arising from previous meetings**

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

**Out of session correspondence**

The RAG is invited to note the out of session correspondence since TRL RAG 35 (12-13 December 2023).

**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 UPDATES FROM 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 2023-24 fishing season.

Government agency members will be asked to provide updates relevant to the TRL Fishery relevant to their jurisdictions.

The RAG will be also invited to note a verbal update from the PNG National Fisheries Authority and Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC (if representatives are in attendance) on matters relevant to the TRL Fishery.

**3 REVISIONS TO THE EMPIRICAL HARVEST CONTROL RULE (eHCR)**

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.

**4 OTHER BUSINESS**

The RAG will be invited to raise any other matters for consideration. There is no agenda paper for this item.

**5 DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING**

The RAG is invited to note the dates and draft agendas for the next RAG meeting.

**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](mailto:georgia.langdon@afma.gov.au))**