Welcome to the July 2017 edition of the fisheries newsletter. In this edition we introduce our new Portfolio Member and TSRA Fisheries Programme staff for Fisheries, as well as provide an update on the status of a range of projects currently underway within the Programme.

One important outcome is the Torres Strait Regional Authority’s (TSRA) purchase of 2 of the last 12 non-indigenous fishing licenses in the Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) Fishery. This achievement has occurred at a good time, with the future of the fishery being discussed through consultations on the development of a TRL Quota System Management Plan through visits by TSRA and AFMA into communities. We would like to thank communities for their constructive input into these discussions that ultimately affect the future of this important fishery.

Mr Jerry Stephen
Portfolio Member for Fisheries

Jerry Stephen is the TSRA Board Member for the Ugar Island Community. Jerry was re-elected for a second term on the Board and has been appointed as the Deputy Chairperson, as well as the Portfolio Member for Fisheries. As the Portfolio Member, Jerry assists the TSRA Chairperson with policy setting and the strategic direction for the Fisheries Programme. Jerry also represents the TSRA at a wide range of Protected Zone Joint Authority forums.

TSRA Fisheries Programme Outcomes

- A commercially viable fishing industry which is 100% owned by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people
- Improved Wealth of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the region
- Sustainable management of fisheries resources
At its August 2015 meeting, the PZJA tasked its agencies to focus on progressing the following areas:

- Development and implementation of a management plan for the tropical rock lobster fishery
- Finalise the Roadmap to 100 per cent ownership
- Improve the monitoring and reporting for the Beche de mer fishery
- Continue to investigate the transfer of domestic compliance responsibilities from Fisheries Queensland to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)
- Develop legislative amendment priorities to provide immediate improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of fisheries administration

Roadmap to 100% Ownership

In 2016, the TSRA completed the extensive community consultation process regarding the draft PZJA Roadmap to 100 per cent Ownership of Torres Strait Commercial Fisheries by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Traditional Owners and Communities. Communities have been providing constructive feedback on strategies to progress the ownership aspirations of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the region. Communities have emphasised the importance of ownership to regional employment and economic development, and the role ownership will play in the ongoing utilisation of their Native Title rights. Stakeholders acknowledge that fisheries will provide an important opportunity to move Torres Strait communities away from reliance on welfare into employment in fishing. The consultation has also highlighted that Torres Strait communities are keen to see the PZJA follow through with their commitment made to support ownership aspirations in April 2014. The TSRA will continue to work with our PZJA partners to progress and endorse the final draft.

Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL- Kiar)

The TSRA Fisheries Programme supports Traditional Inhabitants to gain greater access to the region’s TRL commercial fishery. This includes supporting the aspiration for a sustainable fishery that is 100 per cent owned by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal People living in the region. This aspiration is also acknowledged by the PZJA.

The TSRA Fisheries Programme, in collaboration with AFMA, visited 13 Torres Strait Island communities to consult on the PZJA proposal to implementing a quota management system for TRL (Kiar) commercial fishery through a management plan. Consultations have now been completed and the outcomes will be presented at the next TRL Working Group.

TSRA would like to thank those communities for their time in attending and contributing with their views and concerns regarding the Draft TRL Management Plan.

Also note that the moon tide closures in the TRL commercial fishery have been re-introduced in 2016 and again in the 2017 TRL season. Fishers are reminded to be aware of the closures, and that hookah equipment should not be used during these times.

Bêche De Mer

Fishing activities in the Bêche de mer (BDM) fishery continues to grow and is largely attributed to increased fisher interest associated with the trial of a limited season for Black Teat catch in 2015 and 2016. The buy-out of the last non-indigenous license in the BDM fishery means that communities can develop the fishery with full access to the TACs in place for BDM species. Fishing boats that can be used in the BDM fishery are restricted to 7m or less, which promotes community-based fishing enterprises.

The trial openings of the Black Teat fishery highlighted both the importance of timely reporting and demonstrated that without reporting, there is currently no way of ensuring that catch levels would remain under the allowable catch. In response to this concern and the over catching that took place during the trials, the PZJA has suspended further trials until improved timely reporting of catches can be achieved. PZJA agencies are working with communities to help improved monitoring and reporting processes.

As custodians of our resources, we must ensure delivering accurate catch data and in a timely manner to help inform Management keep yumi Fisheries sustainable for now and future generation.
New Zealand Community Fisheries Management Model

In looking ahead to 100% ownership of commercial fisheries by Torres Strait Islanders, the TSRA looked across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. New Zealand has a well-established framework to manage and build on the fisheries entitlements of the Maori people. The Fisheries Programme commissioned the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security to consider the Maori framework, the lessons learnt in developing it, and provide recommendations that could be applied to Torres Strait fisheries’ assets.

A delegation of Torres Strait leaders and TSRA staff will be meeting with leaders and government representatives in New Zealand to improve understanding around the development of the Maori model of management, as we move forward with developing a model of management for Torres Strait Fisheries assets.

TSRA Sponsorship of the National Seafood Industry Leadership Program (NSILP)

The TSRA is sponsoring two future leaders of the Torres Strait fishing community to participate in the NSILP. Miss Flora Warrior from Mabuiag Island and Mr Charles David from Iama Island have both been successful in securing places in the highly respected program. The first residential training was held in Darwin in March, then will move on to Sydney in June and conclude in Canberra in September 2017. The NSILP is funded by the Australian Government through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and is managed and facilitated by Rural Training Initiatives.

The program focuses on developing practical skills that participants can apply at a personal, business and national industry level. It is designed for people wishing to take up leadership roles at all levels of the seafood industry, from workplace supervisor through to industry representation. The NSILP is the only national industry specific leadership program for the seafood industry and has been developed in consultation with the Australian seafood industry.

Torres Strait Fisheries Guidebook

This guidebook is your guide to commercial fishing rules in the Torres Strait. Each card details regulations for catching and carrying species found in the Torres Strait. It assists people to stay compliant whilst out fishing by providing a quick and easy reference guide. The Guidebook was developed in response to questions raised through community consultation - these questions were in relation to who was responsible for compliance, as well as who to report issues to. TSRA hopes this waterproof Guidebook will assist people to understand fishing regulations for commercial and traditional fisheries, as well as the process involved with reporting any illegal fishing activity to the correct agency that is witnessed out on the water.

TRL cash-for-catch Video

The TSRA has developed a video aimed at increasing awareness and building the capacity of fishers in the TRL Fishery to get the best value for their catch. The video covers:

- Catching/fishing techniques
- Tail vs live kaiar
- Business tips
- The Science

TSRA would like to thank those communities, participants and organisations for their time in helping make this video an educational tool for current and future fishing aspirators. A link to the video can be found on the TSRA website.
Finfish Fishery Leasing

The TSRA holds and administers sunset licences on behalf of traditional inhabitants. Sunset licences are leased to non-indigenous fishers by the TSRA Board, based on advice from the four Finfish communities through the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC). The TSRA Board ensures that catches in the fishery remain below the Total Allowable Catch limits (TAC), set by the Protected Zone Joint Authority, by leasing out the proportion of the TAC not used by the Traditional Inhabitants. Leasing generates revenue for the benefit of Torres Strait communities and keeps markets for Torres Strait finfish products open while the Traditional Inhabitant sector develops. Seven sunset licences are being leased in the next season, which starts on 1 July 2017 and ends on 30 June 2018.

Finfish Fishery Action Plan Implementation

The Finfish Fishery Action Plan was developed by the TSRA in consultation with the communities of Warraber, Poruma, Iama, Dauan, Saibai, Erub, Masig and Mer, as well as Kos and Abob Ugar Fisher Association Members. Its aim is to guide investment of the revenue raised through the leasing of licences in the Finfish Fishery on projects that will increase successful, profitable and sustainable participation in the fishery. Implementation of the Finfish Fishery Action Plan includes the following activities: Skills, Infrastructure and Services Audit, development of a bait fish industry, scoping the potential for Barramundi, Crab and Jewfish Fisheries in Gudamalulg Country, potential for exporting from the Torres Strait and branding Torres Strait Seafood.

Gudamalulgal Fisheries Scoping Study

The TSRA and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) have engaged two well renowned consultants with extensive background in science, management and commercial fishing to investigate the potential for a commercial fishery for barramundi, jewfish and crabs based out of the communities of Boigu, Dauan and Saibai. Community meetings and field work will commence during June and July.
Export and Branding for Torres Strait Seafood

The TSRA Fisheries Programme and FRDC have engaged a group of expert consultants to identify potential options for direct export and brand differentiation for fisheries products from the Torres Strait. Key barriers that have been identified to the development of fisheries in the region are the additional cost of reaching markets and the cost of doing business from a remote location. Research is needed to identify the legislative, administrative and infrastructure requirements for direct export from the Torres Strait, and the key export market opportunities that could be met by Torres Strait-derived products. It will also look to identify unique marketing strategies that may provide opportunities to improve the profitability of fishing operations (increase prices and potentially improve market access), thereby having a positive socio-economic flow on effect to the Traditional Inhabitants of the region and the associated communities.

An Audit of Infrastructure and Services – The TSRA Fisheries Programme will soon be initiating a project to create a Fisheries infrastructure and services development plan for Torres Strait communities, for the maintenance and growth of commercial fishing operations. This includes finfish, beche-de-mer and tropical rock lobster fisheries. The audit will identify the current state of infrastructure and services and also identify communities’ needs and aspirations for additional infrastructure and services that will contribute to addressing shortfalls. It is hoped this plan will then be used in the future to guide and prioritise investment in the Torres Strait region to support viable commercial fishing businesses.

Development of a bait fishing industry in the Torres Strait –

The TSRA Fisheries Programme has recently initiated a project to investigate the feasibility of developing a bait industry in the Torres Strait. Bait species, such as garfish, squid and sardines, may be targeted by fishers operating in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. In some areas, these species are abundant and easily caught using basic line and hand net methods. The project will investigate potential bait markets, including within and outside the Torres Strait, and provide guidance on how an industry could be developed in a sustainable manner.

Indigenous Cadetship

The TSRA Fisheries Programme has advertised a position under the Indigenous Cadetship Programme for a Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal undergraduate student to join the team. The position will help to support a student through a relevant undergraduate degree with a combination of full-time study and negotiated work placements, with the option for ongoing employment when studies are complete. It provides an exciting opportunity for any current student who wants to put their knowledge learned to a practical application in the Torres Strait. Please contact the TSRA Fisheries Programme for further information.
The Fisheries Programme Team

Mr John Ramsay - Programme Manager

John has been a Programme Manager with the TSRA since mid-2010 and was the previous manager of the TSRA's Governance and Leadership Programme. John holds a Master of Public Administration through the Australian New Zealand School of Government and a Master of Professional Studies through the University of New England. John is a member of the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA Cert) and a certified practitioner in Programme Management (MSP). John is a former Australian Army Officer who is currently a member of theInactive Army Reserve holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Ms Mariana Nahas - Project Manager

Mariana has been the Project Manager in the TSRA Fisheries Programme since July 2013. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree with double major in Marine Biology and Aquaculture, and a Master of Fisheries Policy degree. Mariana started her career in the Seafood Industry in 2002, working around Australia on the farming of prawns and pearls. In 2007 she joined the public sector through the Australian Fisheries Management Authority graduate programme and has now gained over 10 years of experience in fisheries-related positions in the public service. Mariana is a qualified project manager and since joining the TSRA Fisheries Programme, has led a series of projects and policy initiatives aimed at increasing industry participation and ownership of fisheries resources by Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal People of the region.

Senior Project Officers

Ms Allison Runck

Allison has joined us after working for 3 years in commercial fisheries and fisheries marine environment policy for Commonwealth fisheries. She is looking forward to visiting communities and working with Ailan people on the development of their fisheries economic activities.

Mr Charles David

Born and raised in the Torres Strait, fishing was part of everyday life for Charles and he has 20 years commercial fishing experience in the Straits. He looks forward to working with all stakeholders on the development of Torres Strait Fisheries for a viable, sustainable seafood industry for the Torres Strait Communities.

Mr John Mathews

John is a keen recreational fisherman and holds an Honours degree in Marine Biology. He came to the TSRA in January 2016, bringing seven years of Commonwealth Public Service experience from Canberra. John is currently working all things finfish, including administering the leasing of sunset licences and managing feasibility studies for new finfish industries.

Administration Support Officer

Ms Alona Holland

Not new to Torres Strait Fisheries, Alona joined TSRA in December 2016. She was employed previously for 12 months completing an Administration Traineeship. Thursday Island born and raised - fishing is a part of her heritage. Alona is enjoying the challenges of the Fisheries Programme.

TSRA Programmemes

Governance and Leadership, Economic Development, Fisheries, Culture, Art and Heritage, Native Title, Environmental Management, Safe Communities, Healthy Communities