RE-ALLOCATING RESOURCES BETWEEN FISHING SECTORS IN TORRES STRAIT COMMERCIAL FISHERIES.

A NON ISLANDER COMMERCIAL FISHING SECTOR VIEW.
HISTORY

- For the last 10 years around 30 primary boats operated by non-indigenous fishers have fished the Torres Strait TRL fishery.
- Collection is by divers using Hookah gear. Catch is by a loop for live and spear for tails.
- Total catch per season has been around 500 tonnes except for 2 blips in 2001 & 2002. Grave fears were held for the fishery.
- New management arrangements were introduced to reduce effort- minimum size levels and a closure from Oct 1 to Jan 31.
- The fishery has since rebounded to a record year in 2005.
- Share of the catch has been between 60-70% commercial and 30-40% Islander.
- No new Commercial licences may be issued.
CONFLICT

- The Traditional Inhabitants have a view that under the TS Treaty they have a priority over the total lobster resource.
- The Commercial sector disagrees and various legal opinions on this matter are in the public arena.
- From 2003 catches have risen steadily to a record year in 2005. Whilst the number of days fished has increased the CPUE has also risen markedly.
- The increased presence of Commercial vessels has been a source of irritation to some island communities and in 2005 a number of confrontations took place at sea.
- The Commercial sector maintains the view that they are legally entitled to fish anywhere in the TS under the terms of their licence.
The PZJA - The rule makers decided substantial changes needed to be made to resolve the conflict.

The PZJA deemed a quota system to be the solution to the problem.

Under the TS treaty PNG is entitled to 25% of the Australian sector and vice versa.

The decision was taken that after the PNG share was allocated the remaining quota would be allocated 50% Indigenous and 50% commercial.

The commercial sector disagreed with this arbitrary allocation but in the interests of resolving conflict they agreed to join the process.
• A voluntary tender process, funded by the Commonwealth, is to be put in place to buy out sufficient commercial licenses to allocate the PNG share.
• If further buyout was needed to adjust the Commercial/Indigenous share then Qld would fund this process.
• As a long term progression the PZJA recommended that the indigenous share should move to 70% using an open market process.
THE FUTURE

• For the TS has occurred due to the vibrant commercial sector.

• The commercial industry component has provided the development of the TS lobster fishery into an economic driver ingredients to create a productive industry such as Catching techniques, Product handling, Marketing and customers and Finance.

• Any dramatic change in the current balance will have a negative effect on all areas of operations, particularly marketing.

• Markets at premium prices are well established in the USA and China.

• If quantities available decline significantly this will change. The commercial sector will lose interest and the economics of the fishery will lose impetus.

• Real economic growth and increased standards of living in the TS will require partnerships to be developed between both sectors of the fishery.