



Australian Government



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## FACT SHEET:

# Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer fishery and black teatfish trial

### Overview of the fishery

The Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery (the Fishery) has been in operation since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumbers) are typically found on reef tops, coral beds and rocky bottoms. Although found throughout the Torres Strait, sea cucumbers are mostly harvested from reefs around the Eastern Islands (Mer, Ugar and Erub). The Fishery is managed by the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) and access to the Fishery is 100 per cent owned by Torres Strait Traditional Inhabitants.

In the past, the Fishery has focussed on high value species, such as sandfish and black teatfish. Due to overfishing of these species, sandfish harvest was closed in 1998 and black teatfish harvest was closed in 2002. While there has been some recovery, catch limits of zero still apply to these species as well as surf redfish. Species currently taken in the Fishery include prickly redfish, white teatfish, curry fish and elephant trunkfish.

### What was the Black Teatfish Trial Harvest?

- In 2009, a stock survey indicated that black teatfish stock was recovering.
- In 2014 and 2015 the PZJA endorsed one month trial openings of black teatfish harvest with a maximum catch of 15 tonnes.
- In both years the catch limit of the trial was exceeded – in 2014 by 1.5 tonnes after 14 days, and by 8.3 tonnes in 2015 after eight days.

### Why was the Black Teatfish Trial Harvest not continued?

- The PZJA did not continue the trial in 2016 due to concerns about the effectiveness of catch reporting and the risk to the sustainability of the stock.
- The PZJA is now working with communities to develop community catch monitoring plans that will be effective in monitoring the daily catch.

### When will there be another Black Teatfish Trial Harvest?

- No trial harvests are planned until effective community catch monitoring plans have been developed.
- To be effective these plans will make sure the Fishery can be closed as soon as the total allowable catch has been reached to prevent any overfishing of the stock.

### What are the other regulations in the Bêche-de-Mer fishery?

The following regulations apply to the Torres Strait Bêche-de-Mer Fishery:

- Fishing vessels used in the fishery must not be greater than 7 metres in length.
- Fishers may only catch sea cucumbers by hand.
- The use of hookah or scuba is not permitted.
- Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits apply to each sea cucumber species.
- Minimum size limits apply to most species.

**Total fishery catch limits for Torres Strait Bêche-de-Mer (sea cucumber) species per season.**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Minimum Size Limit (wet and gutted)</b>	<b>Total Allowable Catch Limit (wet weight gutted)</b>
<b>Sandfish</b> <i>Holothuria scabra</i>	180 mm	0 tonnes
<b>Black teatfish</b> <i>Holothuria whitmaei</i>	250 mm	
<b>Surf redfish</b> <i>Actinopyga mauritiana</i>	220 mm	
<b>White teatfish</b> <i>Holothuria fuscogilva</i>	320 mm	15 tonnes
<b>Prickly redfish</b> <i>Theleota ananas</i>	300 mm	20 tonnes
<b>Elephant trunkfish</b> <i>Holothuria fuscopunctata</i>	240 mm	Combined TAC of 80 tonnes across species
<b>Hairy blackfish</b> <i>Actinopyga miliaris</i>	220 mm	
<b>Burrowing blackfish</b> <i>Actinopyga spinea</i>	220 mm	
<b>Deepwater blackfish</b> <i>Actinopyga palauensis</i>	220 mm	
<b>Curryfish</b> <i>Stichopus hermanni</i>	270 mm	
<b>Lollyfish</b> <i>Holothuria atra</i>	150 mm	
<b>Deepwater redfish</b> <i>Actinopyga echinites</i>	120 mm	
<b>Stonefish</b> <i>Actinopyga lecanora</i>	None	
<b>Greenfish</b> <i>Stichopus chloronotus</i>		
<b>Amberfish</b> <i>Theleota anax</i>		
<b>Brown Sandfish</b> <i>Bohadschia vitiensis</i>		
<b>Leopardfish</b> <i>Bohadschia argus</i>		
<b>Pinkfish</b> <i>Holothuria edulis</i>		

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