

## Media Release No 653

### Saibai and Boigu Rangers continue monitoring pest fish in Torres Strait

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Malu K'iai (Boigu) and Mura Buway (Saibai) Rangers are continuing to monitor the invasive Climbing Perch, locally known as Mabel Wapi and which are known to live in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The enclosed footage was shot at Saibai Island in the north-western Torres Strait. The island is very close to the PNG mainland.

A number of invasive pest fish species occur in PNG and these are found increasingly on its southern coast adjacent to Torres Strait, creating an emerging threat.

Climbing Perch are native to South East Asia, India to western Indonesia. They grow to 25cm long are air-breathers and can move overland (hence the name). Although thought to be a freshwater species, recent surveys have found these fish in saltwater conditions and they are reported to burrow into dry riverbeds for up to 6 months. Spiny gill flaps can lock into place lodging in the throat and intestines of predators (birds, fish, snakes etc). Climbing Perch were introduced to West Papua through Indonesian transmigration and made their way along the southern New Guinea coastal catchments via trading and overland spread. They are now present on Saibai and Boigu Island. Dispersal mechanisms are not clear however options that have been considered include birds, floodwaters and accidental transfer by people.

There is a risk that additional invasive fish species may enter from PNG, especially in the northern islands of Torres Strait and that there is some potential for them to spread to other islands or even mainland Australia.

Education and awareness is also critical in managing invasive fish issues. Educational messages are intended to be based on providing good information about the negative impacts of invasive fish, convincing people not to spread invasive fish, know what invasive fish look like and how to recognise them and encouraging reporting of sightings.

The activities of the Malu K'iai (Boigu) and Mura Buway (Saibai) Rangers are funded by the Australian Government's Working on Country Program, and the Queensland Government's Regional Natural Resource Management Program contributes to the ongoing survey activities for Climbing Perch.

**ENDS**

**TSRA Media Contact – Bruce Nelson telephone (07) 4069 0700**