

2016/17 RECREATIONAL ROCK LOBSTER AND ABALONE FISHERY SURVEY SUMMARY June 2017

This summary provides an overview of survey results that will be further analysed to represent the status of these important fisheries.

Key survey results– Rock lobster

Fishing survey

The survey that you recently participated in is part of an ongoing program to monitor trends in Tasmania's recreational rock lobster and abalone fisheries. It provides information on numbers of active fishers, fishing effort and catches, and supports the sustainable management of these important fisheries.

For this survey we contacted a representative sample of licence holders prior to the start of the 2016/17 fishing season. Eligible fishers (such as yourself) were then invited to participate in the diary survey which involved monitoring rock lobster and abalone fishing activity undertaken between November and the end of April (closure of the Eastern region). Over 450 persons participated in this diary survey.

Recreational licence numbers

Rock lobster and abalone represent very popular recreational fisheries in Tasmania, with the number of persons holding recreational licences doubling since 1995 (see Figure 1). Licence numbers peaked in 2010 but have declined slightly since that time. During 2016/17 about 18,000 persons held a rock lobster licence and 11,000 an abalone licence. Pots remain the most popular of the three rock lobster licence categories, with 15,000 issued in the current season compared with 8,000 dive and 4,500 ring licences.

Catch and effort

Diarists reported almost 2,000 fishing trips catching just over 2,000 rock lobster during the current season. On average, each diarist who fished for lobster reported 6.5 days potting/diving and retained 6.7 lobster for the season. This represented an increase compared with last year, a season particularly affected by biotoxin closures.

Catch and effort by method

Potting was the main fishing method used, accounting for over 80% of all lobster fishing trips and 70% of the catch. Although only 15% of trips were undertaken by divers, this group accounted for over a quarter of the catch, emphasising the fact that catch rates for divers (averaging 1.9 lobster per day) were substantially higher than those for pots (0.9 lobster per day). Rings represented a minor component of the fishery, used mainly off the west coast.

Overall, east coast pot catch rates were higher in the current season when compared with the last few years, approaching levels experienced in the mid-2000s. Dive catch rates, on the other hand, were lower than during the mid-2000s but were similar to that experienced following the east coast bag limit reduction in 2012. This highlights an important difference in the impact that the bag limit has for the two methods (see below).

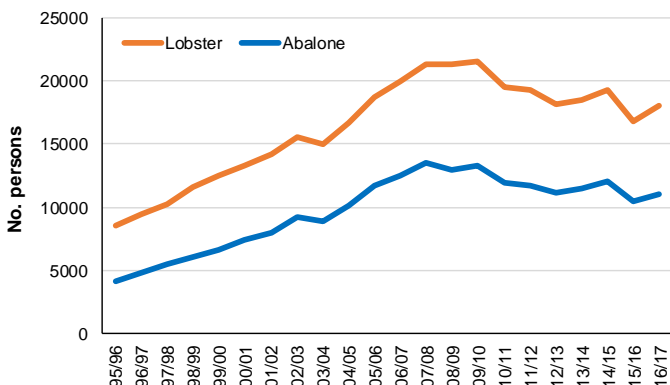


Figure 1. Trends in lobster and abalone licence numbers since 1995.



Catch rates

The impact of the Eastern region daily bag limit of two lobster was clearly evident for divers, with the bag limit achieved in over 60% of trips (Figure 2). Pot fishers were much less likely to take this limit and in fact just under half of all potting trips resulted in no

retained catch (compared with less than one in five dive trips). Western region catch rates for both methods tended to be a higher, with the daily bag limit of five lobster retained on about 40% of dive and 10% of pot trips.

Key survey results – Abalone

Catch and effort

Diarists reported about 220 trips targeting abalone (often combined with diving for lobster), catching over 1,000 abalone. On average, each active diver caught 13 abalone during the survey period, a slight increase compared with the previous fishing season.

Catch and effort by month

Catch and effort patterns for abalone were similar to those observed for rock lobster, with activity most intense during December and January.

Catch rates

Most dive trips targeting abalone resulted in some catch, with one in four dive trips resulting in the daily bag limit of ten abalone being taken (Figure 3). The average catch rate of five abalone per dive-day was similar to that for the previous season.

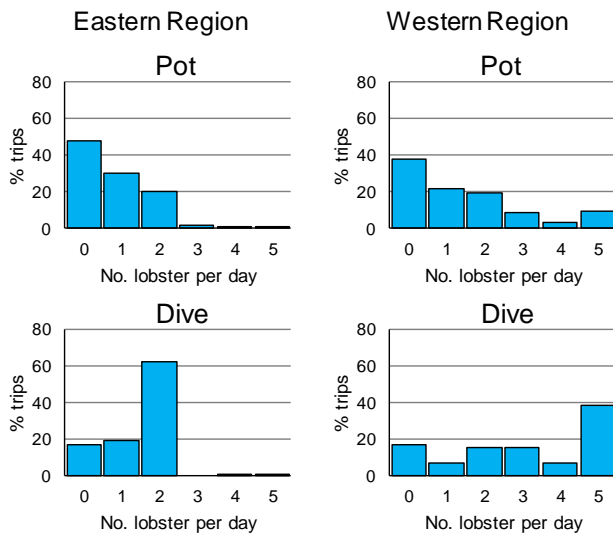


Figure 2. Rock lobster catch per day as a proportion of total effort for pot and dive methods.

Catch and effort by month

Catch and effort varied markedly during the season, with activity being most intense during December and January. Traditionally, November has been a period of heavy fishing activity but the later opening of the east coast (late November) has resulted in a marked reduction in lobster fishing activity at this time.

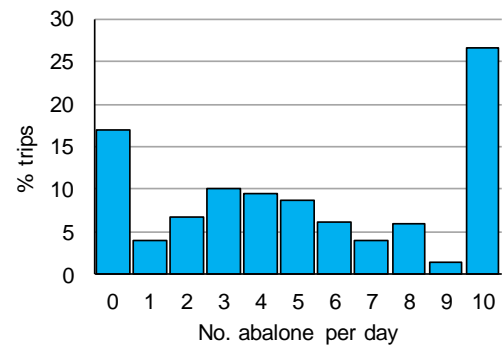


Figure 3. Abalone catch per day as a proportion of total dive effort.



Further Information

Our sincere thanks are extended to everyone who participated in the survey. Further information can be obtained from Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) by calling 6226 8255. The full report will be available shortly on the IMAS website (www.imas.utas.edu.au/research/fisheries-and-aquaculture/publications-and-resources).

The survey was funded by a Fishwise Resource Management grant.