

2017/18 RECREATIONAL ROCK LOBSTER AND ABALONE FISHERY SURVEY SUMMARY August 2018

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 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 2017/18 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). About 450 people participated in this diary survey.

Recreational licence numbers

Rock lobster and abalone represent very popular recreational fisheries in Tasmania, with the number of recreational licence holders doubling since 1995 (see Figure 1). Licence numbers peaked in 2010 but have declined slightly since that time. During 2017/18, about 17,000 persons held a rock lobster licence and 10,800 an abalone licence. Pots remain the most popular of the three rock lobster licence categories, with 14,400 issued in the current season compared with 7,900 dive and 4,500 ring licences.

Catch and effort

Diarists reported over 1,800 fishing trips catching just over 1,700 rock lobster during the current season. Diarists who fished for lobster reported an average of 6.5 days potting/diving and retained six lobster for the season. This represented a slight decline compared with last year, largely due to the impact of the east coast biotoxin closures early in the season.

Catch and effort by method

Potting was the main fishing method used, accounting for 80% of all lobster fishing trips and over 60% of the catch. Although nearly 20% of trips were undertaken by divers, this group accounted for a third of the catch, emphasising the fact that catch rates for divers (averaging 1.6 lobster per day) were substantially higher than those for pots (0.7 lobster per day). Rings represented a minor component of the fishery and were used mainly off the west coast.

Overall, east coast pot catch rates have increased in recent years and are now approaching levels experienced in the mid-2000s. On the other hand, dive catch rates were lower than during the mid-2000s, largely in response to progressive reductions in the east coast bag limit. This highlights an important difference in the impact that the bag limit has for the two methods (see below).

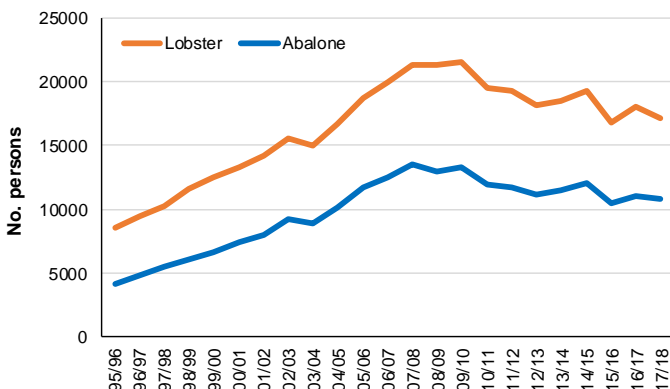


Figure 1. Trends in lobster and abalone licence numbers since 1995.



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 50% 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 four 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 30% of dive and 5% of pot trips.

Key survey results – Abalone

Catch and effort

Diarists reported about 240 trips targeting abalone (often combined with diving for lobster), catching over 1,100 abalone. On average, each active diver caught 14 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 five dives resulting in the daily bag limit of ten abalone being taken (Figure 3). The average catch rate of almost five abalone per dive-day was slightly lower than in the previous season.

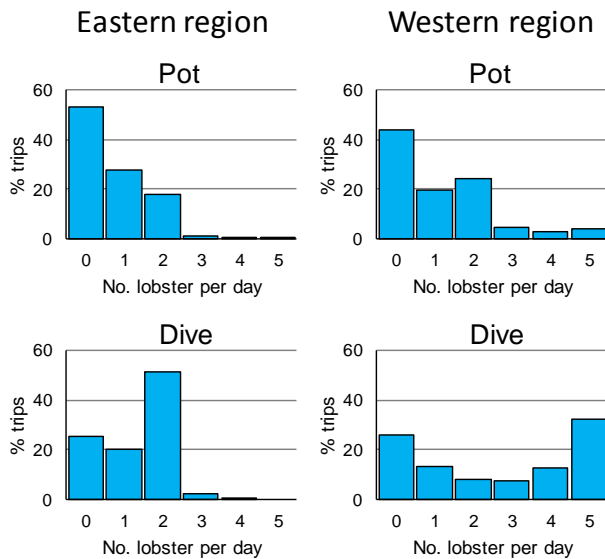


Figure 2. Rock lobster catch per day as a proportion of total effort for pot and dive methods.

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) coupled with the impacts of biotoxin closures has resulted in a marked reduction in lobster fishing activity at this time.

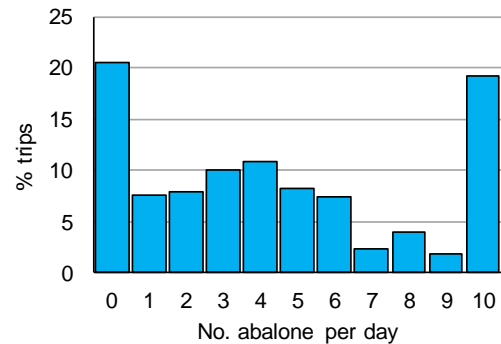


Figure 3. Abalone catch per day as a proportion of total dive effort.



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.