



**tasmanian conservation trust inc**

## **Media Release**

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### **Tasmanian rock lobster fishery review comes to unsatisfactory end and this important fishery continues on its path to disaster**

The ongoing review process for the Tasmanian rock lobster fishery is nearing its final stages, with public comments closing today (8 June 2011). Unfortunately it looks like the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, (DPIPWE) has learned nothing from the previous community consultation process and has ignored obvious solutions to obvious problems. The Tasmanian Government appears to be overseeing the demise of this once iconic fishery.

Fishery modelling has failed to take into account recruitment failure where not enough new juvenile rock lobsters grow to become available to the commercial and recreational fisheries.

"Rock lobster biomass had recovered to twice the size it was when quota was introduced, but in the last 3 years it has declined to such an extent we are back where we started from", says TCT spokesperson Jon Bryan. "The writing has been on the wall for years, but industry has not been prepared to make catch reductions that would protect the gains that have been made since quota was introduced."

Long-standing issues such as high inshore fishing pressure and localised overfishing have also been ignored. "There is nothing in the review's recommendations that will fix these problems", says the TCT spokesperson. "A small reduction in total catch is not going to fix overfishing in localised areas or deal with urchin barrens. There needs to be reduced fishing effort or even rolling closures to allow recovery of the most overfished and damaged areas".

It is absolutely clear that the rapidly expanding *Centrostephanus* urchin barrens that are turning productive reefs into empty wastes is a direct result of overfishing of rock lobsters which are large enough to feed on these big sea urchins and control their numbers. Rocky reef converted to urchin barrens effectively excludes the abalone and rock lobster fisheries, as rock lobster and abalone do not remain on urchin barrens in any significant numbers.

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"The review recommendation of a maximum size limit of 160 mm does not go far enough. Rock lobster larger than 140 mm need to be protected in inshore waters to help control urchin numbers as soon as possible. It is certain that other measures need to be put in place to stop this destruction. Along many parts of the east coast it is unlikely that rock lobster will survive to reach this size anyway, due to current levels of overfishing, but at least a maximum size limit is a start. It is unbelievable that the commercial rock lobster fishery would reject this measure which is aimed at protecting the resource that they depend upon."

The biggest disappointment with the review is that it does not even introduce the basic tools that will be needed to look after this fishery and deal with its problems. "Unless you want to close the whole fishery down, or watch it collapse, there is no question that area management of the fishery will be needed to solve problems associated with localised overfishing, inshore fishing pressure and *Centrostephanus* urchin barrens. As a minimum, management of the commercial fleet must be able to direct effort away from inshore waters shallower than 30 m and local overfished areas. The abalone fishery provides a mechanism for area based fishery management and directing fishing pressure if no better option can be devised by DPIPWE for the rock lobster fishery."

Problems experienced by the Tasmanian rock lobster fishery exporting into China last year may just be the start of difficulties getting rock lobster into international markets. If nothing is done to stop the ever expanding urchin barrens and habitat destruction that is occurring as a result of overfishing of rock lobster, it is hard to see how this industry can get export approvals under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The TCT believes that it is time for Minister Bryan Green to take a lead and get his department to act now to protect Tasmania's vital rock lobster fishery and our marine environment. Years of inaction under previous Ministers have resulted in critical damage to the fishery and the marine environment as urchin barrens extend along the coast. The current review of this fishery is the obvious time to deal with these longstanding problems.

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