

Recreational Rock Lobster Fishery Policy

for

Biotoxin Events

September 2016

Closures for Recreational Fishing in Biotoxin Zones

Recreational rock lobster fishing closures are implemented for biotoxin zones closed for commercial fishing under the [Rock Lobster Biotoxin Plan and Decision Protocol](#).

Associated policies:

1. Transiting Arrangements

Unlike seasonal closures, fishers may possess rock lobster pots, rings and rock lobster on their boat and transit a closed biotoxin zone. Recreational fishers cannot set pots or rings or possess rock lobster on the water within a closed biotoxin zone.

2. Licence Refunds

Recreational licence refunds will not be granted to licence holders unable to fish in their desired area due to biotoxin closures. Licences grant access to all Tasmanian waters and biotoxin closures apply only to specific zones within those waters. During the open season, licence holders can still fish outside any areas closed due to biotoxins.

3. Communication

Pre-season general communications will be provided during the recreational licence renewal process and in the Recreational Fishing Guide. Recreational fishers will be kept informed using the following communication mediums:

Web: www.fishing.tas.gov.au - [Biotoxin Fishery Events](#)
Email alerts: [Recreational Fishing News e-newsletter](#)
Facebook: www.facebook.com/FisheriesTasmania

These communication mediums will also encourage fishers to stay informed about public health alerts by going to www.publichealthalerts.tas.gov.au and where appropriate reflect the public health advice on the Department's Biotoxin Event webpage.

Background

The East Coast rock lobster fishery is a high profile fishery currently faced with pressing issues around low stocks (as a result of a protracted period of low recruitment), a strategy for rebuilding stocks and sharing of the resource between the commercial and non-commercial sectors. Overlaying these issues is the emerging complexity of annual harmful algal blooms.

Blooms of toxic algae species off eastern Tasmania are a relatively new phenomenon, however, since 2012 such events have become seasonally regular and increasingly severe. It is likely that such events will become an annual occurrence in these waters.

The management response for monitoring and responding to biotoxin bloom events impacting the rock lobster fishery is in accordance with the [Rock Lobster Biotoxin Plan and Decision Protocol](#) (the Protocol).

When the Protocol requires an area to be closed to fishing for rock lobster, the policy position is that the fishery will be closed for both the commercial and recreational sectors. This position was adopted in consideration of risks associated with public health, commercial fishery international market access and orderly fisheries management.

The management response to the harmful algal bloom (HAB) outbreaks and the understandings and scientific understanding of these events have been evolving since 2012. It is likely that management will adapt in response to improvements in scientific understanding and technological advancements in monitoring and testing.

Laboratory tests have indicated that paralytic shellfish toxin (PST) levels do not accumulate in the white flesh of rock lobster. However, high levels do accumulate in the hepatopancreas (liver) and other organs (viscera) and these PST's are highly toxic to humans. It is also the case that the consumption of the "mustard" or tamale from rock lobster is a relatively common practice. The consumption of a single lobster in such a manner could pose a severe human health risk.

It is recognised, however, that the level of understanding of the risks and PST accumulation in rock lobster are increasingly understood in the recreational sector which may reduce the public health risk to some degree. This has led to some within the recreational sector calling for the management of PST in rock lobster to rely on public health alerts and not fishery closures.

There are also complex interlinked fisheries management issues that may present risks to the East Coast Stock Rebuilding Strategy if biotoxin affected zones remained open to the recreational fishery and closed to the commercial fishery for an extended period.

To achieve the stock rebuilding goal by 2023, the total catch by both sectors needs to be constrained to an annual predetermined level. The commercial sector has explicit catch controls applied to it through quota and a catch cap system, whilst recreational catch is managed via indirect catch controls (primarily daily limits and seasons).

Additional management measures may be required to keep the strategy on track to deliver stock rebuilding objectives.

Meanwhile the impacts and implications of biotoxin closures to the stock rebuilding strategy are unclear. There is risk that the objectives of the strategy could be compromised if the recreational sector was to be permitted access to rock lobster stocks during biotoxin bloom events when the commercial fishery is shut.

On balance, given these interconnecting issues, including the ongoing development of East Coast rock lobster fisheries management and the biotoxin bloom event management, the policy of closing both the commercial and recreational rock lobster fisheries (should a closure be required) is not under review at this time.

There are a number of research projects which may inform future management of biotoxin risks. The Department will convey the findings to the wider community, as these projects findings are known.