



TAFI Media Release



TASMANIAN AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES INSTITUTE

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Reminder of special closures to rock lobster fishing

Fishermen are being reminded that two reserves along Tasmania's east and south-east coast are closed to lobster fishing as the recreational lobster harvesting season gets underway this weekend.

These two areas are the Elephant Rock Research Area off St Helens in the state's north east and the eastern shore of North Bay or 'Southerly Bottom'. Southerly Bottom is on the north eastern corner of the Forrestier Peninsula in the state's south east.

These two sites have been declared reserves to enable a study by Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI) scientists into biological control of the long-spined sea urchin by rock lobster predation.

Both areas are closed to commercial and recreational fishing by diving and the use of rock lobster pots or rings for up to three years. Recreational fishing for scale fish by rod and line is permitted.

TAFI project research officer Dr Craig Sanderson said the long-spined sea urchins overgraze seaweeds and benthic invertebrates on rocky reef areas, which are a key habitat for abalone and rock lobster as well as a nursery area for many scale fish species.

"The threat to fisheries by this urchin in Tasmania is of concern to the entire Tasmanian fishing industry and the introduction of control methods has seen unprecedented support from fishers," Dr Sanderson said.

"Researchers have increased the population of large rock lobsters at these sites to test how effective rock lobsters are at predating on the urchins in wild conditions."

The Elephant Rock Research Area was declared a reserve in April 2008 and Southerly Bottom became a reserve in April 2009.

"Observations so far at St Helens indicate a small downward trend in urchin numbers and some regrowth of seaweed and algae on the barrens created by the urchins," Dr Sanderson said.

The large rock lobsters released into the research areas are specially marked with two separate holes of at least 5mm in diameter in the tail fan and two lines of blue and/or yellow coloured dye in the muscle tissue on the underside of the rock lobster's tail. They also have a blue T-bar tag under the tail with the words "TAFI RESEARCH ILLEGAL TO TAKE".

Dr Sanderson said that as well as the fishing restrictions within the research areas, it is an offence to be in possession of the TAFI marked research rock lobster, which must be immediately released if caught in Tasmanian waters.

The project is funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

For more information about the research areas, please contact the Wild Fisheries Management Branch, DPIPWE on (03) 6233 7042 or visit www.fishing.tas.gov.au or www.zoo.utas.edu.au/urchin/index

For further information about the sea urchin control project or interviews please contact Dr Craig Sanderson by phone on (03) 6226 2522

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