

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Win-win for Tassie's rock lobster industry**

Bigger, redder rock lobsters in more abundance for the Asian seafood market are now a commercial reality, with Tasmania's fishing industry agreeing to fund their translocation from deep to shallower water.

The collaboration between the University of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Rock Lobster Fisherman's Association and the State Government means the lobster industry is now taking advantage of a market paying \$70 a kilo for lobsters – and \$5 a kilo more for bright red ones.

Successful pilot studies by University of Tasmania scientists led by Associate Professor Caleb Gardner and Dr Bridget Green at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies have shown lobsters growing in deeper water are slower growing and paler in colour but greater in number than those in shallower water.

The findings had implications for the \$60m industry in terms of production because lobsters in shallow water grow eight times faster than those in deep water. The research is outlined in the most recent edition of the UTAS research publication, Research to Reality.

"There were two options to increase lobster stocks around the Tasmanian coastal reefs," Dr Gardner said.

"One was to decrease the catch; the other was to get the existing lobsters to grow faster and larger," Dr Gardner said.

"Our research allows us to choose the second option - increasing abundance without further cuts in catch."

Victoria and South Australia began the research with Tasmania but dropped out; Tasmania is the only state benefiting.

Dr Gardner said: "There are serious gains to be made by moving lobsters, especially into the very high growth inshore areas of northern Tasmania.

"Once we'd looked at the biology and the implications on the fisheries system of moving lobsters between areas, the fishing industry moved to fund the translocation operations on a commercial scale.

“In late 2011 the industry voted in favour of paying a small fee for every unit of lobster quota they own; this pays for moving the lobsters,” he said.

The commercial component of translocation is now completely funded by industry although research activity continues to monitor and fine-tune the operations.

The Tasmanian Government is active in supporting the project through policy development, required to combine translocation with existing management arrangements for the fishery.

Translocation operations are integrated with the quota system used to control the catch by commercial fishermen. So far the strategy has been to combine tight controls on quota with faster growth from translocation to rebuild wild lobster stocks in Tasmanian waters.

This rebuilding is expected to occur state-wide because commercial fishing effort is attracted to areas where lobsters are released, which reduces overall fishing pressure on lobster stocks right around Tasmania.

The situation is a win-win for everyone: fishermen benefit from stability in quotas and lower fishing costs as lobsters become more abundant; lobster stocks increase which implies a more natural ecosystem, and the Asian market gets redder lobsters.

The feasibility research for this project was supported by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and the Australian Seafood CRC through two grants totalling \$1.156m. The research continues to be funded by the Australian Seafood CRC, with \$794,000 awarded in 2012.

Other UTAS research included in the September edition of Research to Reality includes work on mussel aquaculture at Triabunna; improvements in making sparkling wine in Tasmania; and research on the impact of the Museum of Old and New Art on the State.

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