



Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995

***2011 UPDATE OF POLICY DOCUMENT FOR THE
TASMANIAN COMMERCIAL DIVE FISHERY***



January 2011

Introduction

The management plan for the commercial dive fishery was introduced in December 2005 and, since then, industry and the Department have identified some areas which could be addressed to help improve the fishery. These areas are identified in this document which should be read in conjunction with the 2005 Commercial Dive Fishery Policy Paper. The basic management principles, remain in place in the fishery, guided by the precautionary principle. This update policy paper is not a legal document but aims to provide non-legal explanation for the changes introduced in the commercial dive fishery management plan.

Overview of the commercial dive fishery since the introduction of the management plan in Dec. 2005.

Since the commercial dive management plan was initiated in December 2005, there have been 32 licence transfers which have introduced new personnel to the fishery. This “change in the guard” has also seen significant developments in catch and marketing in the fishery. New practices have been developed particularly in relation to the purging of periwinkles and the management plan needs to be updated to cater for these developments.

Periwinkles

Initially, most interest in the fishery centred on periwinkles rather than sea urchins, with the focus largely in the Developed Zone. The catch limit of 17.6 tonnes of periwinkles was reached in the developed zone in the first licensing year, but the undeveloped zone was left largely untapped as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Periwinkle Catch 2006/2007 – 2009/2010 Tonnes (2009/2010 excludes catch for August 2010)

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Periwinkles Central East/ South East Zone	18.91	17.61	8.54	2.69
Periwinkles Undeveloped Zone	6.63	17.62	11.30	7.73
Total Periwinkles Caught	25.54	35.23	19.84	10.42

In 2007/2008 the strategy of separate catch limits for periwinkles in both the developed and undeveloped zones as well as market demand, saw effort extending into the undeveloped zone. There was a more even spread of effort with the catch limit being reached in both zones. However, the following year, catch in periwinkles declined and focus began to move to sea urchins.

In 2009/2010 the trends of a decline in periwinkle catch and interest in sea urchins continued. Some reports stated that periwinkle stocks remained high and that the lower catch was a reflection of having a number of new, less experienced divers operating. It was also reported that many divers had simply moved their efforts into other areas as supported by the interest in sea urchins. It was also suggested that periwinkle populations were not recovering as well as hoped. The decline in catch is a concern and needs to be investigated. To this end, the Department and the Commercial Dive Association are working with the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI) to develop a research project to learn more about periwinkle biology and population structure in Tasmania. This project will be partly sponsored from the research fund to which all commercial diver licence holders contribute

when they renew their licences each year. For the interim, the minimum size limit of periwinkles has been increased to 40 mm and catch figures will be carefully monitored.

Over the four year period that the management plan has been operating, periwinkles have fetched a beach price of \$3.50 to \$4.50 per kilogram.

Sea Urchins

Heliocidaris

The catch of *Heliocidaris* increased gradually for the first two years of the plan and then jumped significantly in 2009/2010. Reports from divers state that stocks remain high and that the fishery is healthy.

For *Heliocidaris* sea urchins, the minimum size limit has remained at 60mm over the term of the management plan. The percentage of roe has consistently been around 7.5 per cent of live whole weight of which about 53 per cent of the roe has been A grade and 47 per cent B grade. A grade roe has been valued at around \$45.00/kg compared with about \$5.00/ kg for the B grade roe.

Table 2: *Heliocidaris* Catch 2006/2007 – 2009/2010 Tonnes (2009/2010 excludes catch for August 2010)

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
<i>Heliocidaris</i> Urchins Cent East Zone	0.37	0.84	0.44	12.02
<i>Heliocidaris</i> Urchins South East Zone	19.26	25.84	21.74	25.79
<i>Heliocidaris</i> Urchins Undeveloped Zone	0.78	0.40	6.48	7.43
Total <i>Heliocidaris</i> Urchins Caught	20.41	27.09	28.66	45.24

Centrostephanus

The fishery potential for *Centrostephanus* is still uncertain but markets have been trialed and are being developed. Over 10 tonnes of *Centrostephanus* have been harvested to date this licensing year. There remains neither size limit nor catch limit for *Centrostephanus* for 2010/2011.

Main points and changes in the 2010 draft plan

Following recent discussions with stakeholders, the Department identified the main issues considered in the development of the commercial dive management plan. These issues are briefly described below.

Licence numbers – No change

Existing effort within the fishery matches the available markets at present, thus precluding the need for the Department to propose a reduction in licence numbers. Instead, the number of licences would remain at 55. The Department will continue to monitor the balance between sustainability of the fishery, number of licences and available markets.

Quota Management – No change

The Department does not consider the allocation of individual quota to be justifiable at this time. Quota systems are more complicated than the catch limit arrangements currently in place. Allocation and transfer processes, development of a means to allow up-to-date tracking of

individual catches, increased compliance procedures, enhanced electronic recording systems, increased data input demands and an improved facility for real time reporting would all be required, at cost to industry.

Moreover, catch limit arrangements in place are proving effective, with the catch of sea urchins not having approached the TAC in any zone, and periwinkle markets having been fully satisfied with the available tonnage.

Research Levy – increase from \$100 to 100 fee units

It is proposed to change the research levy payable at renewal on each licence from \$100 to 100 fee units (in 2010 a fee unit = \$1.36). This will mean that the levy will keep pace with CPI and provide an acceptable basis for further research agreements.

The Zones – No change

After initial concern that the spread of catch from the three zones may be uneven, effort has settled into an acceptable distribution. Discussions with divers indicate that individual divers regularly work to their own rotational system, alternating their harvest areas.

There has been discussion with divers about creating additional zones to cater for specific areas. Smaller and more numerous zones, however, would make compliance issues more complicated, would require additional layers of management and would complicate operations for industry with more catch limits, potential zone closures and issues regarding traversing multiple zones on a fishing trip. Therefore, no new zones are proposed.

Traversing areas closed to the take of certain controlled fish while having those controlled fish on the vessel.

The rules currently prohibit divers having fish on board their vessel in areas which have been closed to the take of that type of fish. This prohibition has presented some difficulties when divers wish to cross closed waters to access their home port or other fishing grounds. It is therefore proposed that the rule be changed to state that no diver on a vessel with controlled commercial dive species on board may **dive** in any area closed to the take of those fish.

Seasonal closure of south-eastern and central-eastern sea urchin zones (*Heliocidaris* only)

The current policy states that the Department will formally close the developed areas to the take of the *Heliocidaris* immediately following the peak spawning period.

This period can vary in both commencement time and duration. This year, a trial is being run to see if market forces would have the same effect as a formal closure, with poor quality and quantity of roe leading fishers to cease harvesting voluntarily. If this proves to be the case, it will give the industry greater flexibility and help ensure urchins are available to the market as soon as quality and quantity of roe allow.

Whelks – Species no longer available

For the past five years, whelks have been included as a controlled fish under the commercial dive rules. However, there has never been great interest in whelks as a commercial species with only small quantities being taken, generally on a trial basis.

Very little is known about whelks or whelk stocks. Information on growth rate, size at maturity and the sizes of existing populations is extremely limited, making it hard to set a size limit, and with catch so low it is impossible to set a meaningful TAC.

It should be noted that divers have reported that after whelks have been harvested, even in low numbers, areas seem to remain depleted for extended periods.

Also of concern is that there is a number of similar appearing whelk species, some of which are carrion feeders, that may represent a threat to human health if consumed.

As concerns associated with whelks are high and returns are low, it is proposed to delist them as a species under the commercial dive rules.

Dual licence holders being permitted to take commercial dive species while on an abalone fishing trip

At present, a diver fishing under the authority of a fishing licence (commercial dive) must not be in possession of abalone or rocklobster.

There are, however, divers who hold both a commercial dive licence and an abalone dive licence. Operators have argued that abalone diving and commercial dive should be allowed on the same trip provided the appropriate licences are held. To this end, trials have been conducted under permit to assess the viability of allowing abalone and commercial dive species to be taken on the one trip. The trials indicated it is feasible, but that there are some risks involved in that abalone divers could unlawfully harvest commercial dive species and holders of a commercial dive licence may be tempted to help harvest abalone. Such behaviour, however, if detected, would attract a serious penalty regarding both licences.

It is therefore proposed to introduce a rule stating that all divers on a boat, which has both commercial dive species and abalone on board, must own (or supervise) an abalone dive licence and a commercial dive licence. That is, all divers on that boat must be dual licence holders.

Flexibility regarding the incidental take of a small amount of undersize fish

The rules currently do not allow for a small amount of undersize fish that are at times inadvertently and unavoidably taken when harvesting. This is particularly a problem with species such as periwinkles where many individuals are included in each kilogram harvested and the fishing method may sweep both size and undersize fish into the catch.

It is therefore proposed that a rule be introduced to give divers ten per cent leeway in relation to undersize fish.

No supervisors on commercial dive licences

The policy of not allowing supervisors on commercial dive licences (owner-operated licences) remains well supported by industry and is proposed to continue.

Fishing Licence (Vessel) – No change to draft plan

The possibility of introducing a “fishing licence (vessel) commercial dive only” has been raised by some fishers. Industry was given the opportunity to consider this possibility recently but supported the existing system. The view was that licence holders had invested in FLVs which were valuable assets.

Cauf (Purge) sites

The Department has introduced rules to accommodate the placement, removal and transport of fish to and from cauf sites. These changes require divers to keep their own records of what is on a purge site at any time. Example formats are attached as a guide at Appendix 1. The Department will not supply these forms. New Rules relating to cauf sites are:

Caufing of controlled fish

The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) who has taken controlled fish must not store or purge those fish in State waters other than –

- (a) in a fish cauf site that is endorsed on that holder's licence; or
- (b) in a marine farm.

Restriction on use of fish caufs

(1) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) must not be in possession of a fish cauf, or place controlled fish in a fish cauf, in State waters, unless the licence is endorsed for the use of a fish cauf.

(2) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) that is endorsed for the use of a fish cauf must not –

- (a) use a fish cauf anywhere other than a place specified in that licence for that use; or
- (b) place controlled fish into a fish cauf on any day unless the commercial diver's docket for those controlled fish has been completed for that day; or
- (c) place in a fish cauf controlled fish that have been taken for recreational purposes or under the authority of another licence.

(3) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive), in using a fish cauf, must ensure that –

- (a) controlled fish taken on any one day are kept in a separate container in the fish cauf from controlled fish taken on any other day; and
- (b) if more than one kind of controlled fish is taken on any one day, each kind of controlled fish taken on that day is kept in a separate container in the fish cauf; and
- (c) each container in the fish cauf is clearly marked with the following:
 - (i) the date on which the controlled fish were placed in the fish cauf;
 - (ii) the commercial diver's docket number completed for the controlled fish.

(4) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) that is endorsed for the use of a fish cauf must not, at any time after 30 days from the start of a new licensing year, possess in a fish cauf controlled fish taken in the previous licensing year.

(5) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) that is endorsed for the use of a fish cauf must keep a record of the following:

- (a) the time and date when controlled fish are placed in each fish cauf;
- (b) the kind and quantity of controlled fish so placed;
- (c) the time and date when controlled fish are removed from each fish cauf;
- (d) the kind and quantity of controlled fish so removed;

(e) the quantity of daily stock, for each kind of controlled fish, in each fish cauf.

(6) A record under subrule (5) is to be made –

(a) before the end of the day on which the controlled fish are placed in the fish cauf; and

(b) before the controlled fish leave the landing site to which the controlled fish are first taken after their removal from the fish cauf.

(7) The holder of a fishing licence (commercial dive) must keep a record under subrule (5) in good condition, for at least 5 years.

There will also be changes to how the commercial dive log books need to be completed, particularly relating to purging fish. Fishers and processors therefore need to become familiar with the new instructions for completing log books.

Rule to cover compulsory deckhand – No change

The Department does not intend to introduce a ruling on the introduction of compulsory deckhands. Such a ruling would not fall under the powers of the Department as it is neither a fishing sustainability nor a licensing issue. Other industries have addressed concerns in this area through codes of conduct.

Log Books

There is a number of changes proposed to the Commercial Diver's Docket Book: (see Appendix 3.)

1. "Date of fishing trip" will be changed to read "Commencement date of fishing trip"

2. As noted, requirements for purged (caufed) fish will be revised.

3. Divers will be required to fill in Part A (or its modified equivalent) before leaving the site of landing. Part A may still show an estimated weight but the weights shown in part B must be accurate. The landing site will generally be defined as an area within 50 metres on the landward side from the high tide mark closest to the point of landing. However exceptions as in the abalone rules have been included as follows:

(a) at Great Musselroe Bay, the area within a radius of 200 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing in Great Musselroe Bay;

(b) at Bluff Hill Point, the area within a radius of 200 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing in Mawson Bay;

(c) at Couta Rocks, the area within a radius of 200 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing at Couta Rocks;

(d) at Garden Point near Port Arthur, the area within a radius of 500 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the launching ramp in Long Bay;

(e) at a place within 5 kilometres of Granville Harbour, the area within a radius of 1 500 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing;

(f) at Green Point near Marrawah, the area of Green Point Road to the intersection of Green Point Road and Comeback Road;

(g) at Ocean Beach, the area within a radius of 200 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing at Braddon Point;

(h) at Petal Point, the area within a radius of 150 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the commencement of the access road at the southern end of Lemons Beach;

(i) at South Arm, the area within a radius of 500 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the launching ramp in Halfmoon Bay;

(j) at Temma, the area within a radius of 200 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing in Temma Harbour;

(k) at Trial Harbour, the area within a radius of 300 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing in Trial Harbour;

(l) at Southport at the boat ramp on the northern side of the Southport narrows, an area that is within 50 metres of the landward side of the high-water mark of that boat ramp, including Kingfish Beach Road in an easterly direction of that boat ramp until that road intersects with the Huon Highway, and an area 30 metres in any direction from the centre of that intersection;

(m) at any other place, the area within a radius of 50 metres on the landward side from the high-tide mark closest to the point of landing.

If you are aware of other sites that would present difficulties for your reporting requirements, please notify the Department in writing of the name of the landing site and a suggested definition.

4. Part B of the docket book will be changed to record accurate weights of periwinkle and sea urchin catches and may be completed by a licensed processor or, in the case of purging, by the diver prior to placing the fish on the cauf site.

