

Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery 2011

Progress against SEWPaC recommendations



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Progress in implementing Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) recommendations for the Queensland Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery.

The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) made a range of recommendations to Fisheries Queensland, a service of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation during its third assessment of the Queensland Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery in 2010, in order to address perceived risks or uncertainties. Details of the progress Fisheries Queensland has made in relation to the current recommendations as of August 2011 are outlined in this document.

The fishery is due to be reassessed on 14 October 2015.

Recommendation 1:

Operation of the Queensland Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery will be carried out in accordance with the Queensland Fisheries Act 1994, Fisheries Regulation 2008, and Marine Parks Act 2004.

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| Progress: Ongoing |
| All operations in the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery during 2010 were carried out under the appropriate legislation. |

Recommendation 2:

Fisheries Queensland to inform the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) of any intended amendments to the management arrangements that may affect the criteria on which Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act decisions are based.

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| Progress: Ongoing |
| No changes to management arrangements were made to the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery during 2010. |

Recommendation 3:

Fisheries Queensland to produce and present reports to SEWPaC annually as per Appendix B to the 'Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries 2nd Edition'.

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| Progress: Ongoing |
| Fisheries Queensland continues to produce fishery specific reports on an annual basis. In 2011, the seventh Queensland Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery Annual Status Report was produced. It is available to the public and other stakeholders through Fisheries Queensland's website www.fisheries.qld.gov.au |

Recommendation 4:

Fisheries Queensland to:

- a) review management arrangements to further reduce ghost fishing within the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery
- b) continue to develop and encourage the use of protected species friendly gear in the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery
- c) report to SEWPaC as part of the annual report, on the level of uptake of biodegradable materials and protected species friendly gear by fishers. If uptake is low then consideration to be given to introducing appropriate management actions.

Progress: In Progress

(a) Fisheries Queensland continues to promote the awareness of issues associated with ghost fishing. A brochure entitled 'Responsible Crabbing' has been developed by Fisheries Queensland in conjunction with the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM). The brochure provides recommendations on the construction and use of crab pots in Queensland waters to help mitigate ghost fishing. This information has been well received by all stakeholders, including conservation agencies, with future brochures being requested for tackle shops and boat shows etc.

(b) Fisheries Queensland continues to encourage the use of protected species friendly gear in the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery. This recommendation will be met through the review of management arrangements for this fishery which commenced in 2011. Fisheries Queensland will continue to promote the responsible crabbing approach—which includes tips on modifying existing crab pots to avoid capturing protected species.

As part of a fisheries research project in the Northern Territory, a small number of Queensland mud crab fishers have been trialling escape vents in their pots. The escape vents are rectangular in shape and are designed to allow undersized crabs that have entered the pot to escape.

Feedback on the escape vents has been very positive, with fishers noticing almost no cannibalism of crabs and very few undersized crabs present in lifted pots—compared to pots without the escape vents. Queensland mud crab fishers already trialling the use of the escape vent have indicated that they will continue to use and progress towards the installation of this device across all of their C1 apparatus. Fisheries Queensland believes these modifications to the fishing gear would prove beneficial in the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery.

(c) Evidence suggests that fishers are using and promoting the use of environmentally sound fishing practices, including the use of biodegradable components such as sinking rope, rubber in funnels and rubber bands in pot drawstrings, and protected species friendly gear (the use of escape vents is detailed above). The majority of crab pot wholesalers and manufacturers have also adopted the information from the 'Responsible Crabbing' brochure.

Fisheries Queensland is yet to conduct a representative survey of the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery operators to determine an approximate uptake of protected species friendly or biodegradable gear. Presently, Fisheries Queensland is drawing comparisons between the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery and the Mud Crab Fishery based on the Fisheries Observer Program (FOP) data collected during 2011. Approximately 30% of the pots observed had sinking rope and 12% had some modification to mitigate bycatch—modifications were mainly rubber drawstrings and rat-holes, and were adopted by four of the 18 fishers observed on the trips to date. Operators in the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery also continue to use heavier apparatus and trotlines which aim to mitigate the impacts of fishing on protected species. The 'Responsible Crabbing' brochure has now been in circulation for one year. Fisheries Queensland anticipates the percentage of modified pots will increase over time as more C1 operators adopt the fisheries code of best practice and witness the use of the modified apparatus by fellow operators. Fisheries Queensland intends to contact a representative number of blue swimmer crab fishers to

determine the level of uptake of biodegradable materials and protected species friendly gear by fishers for inclusion into the next status report for this fishery.

The above information has been incorporated into the 2011 Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery Annual Status Report (refer to 'Responsible crabbing' within the 'Main management methods used' section).

Recommendation 5:

Fisheries Queensland to continue to review mechanisms to validate commercial logbook data for blue swimmer crabs focusing on the logbook returns of the pot sector.

Progress: In Progress

Fisheries Queensland continues to develop and implement appropriate mechanisms to validate the commercial logbook data across all Queensland fisheries.

In 2010–11 the Queensland Mud Crab Fishery was chosen as one of several fisheries to be observed by the Fisheries Observer Program (FOP). Once the program has collected enough data to provide a representative sample and the data has been analysed, Fisheries Queensland may be able to use the data to give an indication of the accuracy of the logbook reporting for C1 operators generally. Fisheries Queensland will continue to consider appropriate validation tools specifically for the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery over the term of the current approval.

Recommendation 6:

Fisheries Queensland:

- a) by September 2012 complete a survey of recreational fishers regarding blue swimmer crabs and incorporate the results into the management regime of the fishery
- b) by September 2013 undertake a risk analysis of Indigenous fishing to blue swimmer crab stocks. Should the analyses identify a risk, undertake a new survey of Indigenous fishing for blue swimmer crabs to quantify the level of take.

Progress: In Progress

(a) In 2010 Fisheries Queensland commenced a new statewide recreational fishing survey (SWRFS). This survey will provide current and robust data about the recreational harvest of blue swimmer crabs and other species by Queenslanders. The results of this survey will be available by mid 2012. Incorporation into the management regime for the Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery will be dependant on the results of the survey.

(b) A risk analysis considering the impact of Indigenous fishing on Queensland's blue swimmer crab stock has not yet been initiated. There are no current estimates of the traditional harvest of blue swimmer crabs in Queensland. Indigenous catch and effort of blue swimmer crabs is likely to be small—figures collected as part of the 2001 National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey (NRIFS) found that only 882 blue swimmer crabs (less than 1 t) were harvested by Indigenous fishers. The low level of reported catch in northern Queensland could be reflective of the distribution of blue swimmer crabs, which are more prolific in the southern part of Queensland.

Fisheries Queensland intends to undertake a risk analysis on the Indigenous harvest of blue swimmer crabs to identify potential risks in the future.

