

2024/25 Total allowable commercial catch for the Victorian Rock Lobster Fishery

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I am pleased to advise that I have set the Rock Lobster Fishery total allowable commercial catches (TACCs) for the upcoming season, commencing on 1 July 2024, at:

- **245 tonne in the Western Zone Rock Lobster Fishery**
- **21 tonne in the Eastern Zone Rock Lobster Fishery**

These catch levels follow the future direction set under the new draft Harvest Strategy and draft Management Plan introduced in last year's TACC setting process, whilst also aligning with the target exploitation rate in the existing strategy. This approach has received unanimous support from the Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG).

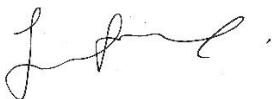
In determining these TACCs, an extra year of data was added to the calculations underpinning the exploitation rate and biomass target in the draft Harvest Strategy. The recalculation allows the Western Zone TACC cap to increase to 245 tonne to meet the rebuild target of 28% of pre-fishing available biomass by 2043. Importantly, there has been no change to the 20-year biomass target or rebuild objectives; it simply incorporates 2023 stock assessment data, which reflects recent high recruitment and catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE). This cap of 245 tonne will be in place for the 5-year life of the new Harvest Strategy.

Western Zone

The Western Zone continues to show improvements in CPUE, increasing to 0.79 kg per pot-lift from 0.74 in the previous season. In setting the 2023/24 TACC, the decision was made to apply to new draft harvest strategy control rules. This decision recognised the low productivity in the fishery, with the PRI sitting just above the current strategy's threshold. Application of the revised harvest strategy places less reliance on recruitment and greater reliance on increases in available biomass, thereby accounting for lower fishery productivity. The RLRAG unanimously endorsed continuing with the application of the draft harvest strategy in setting the 2024/25 TACC.

Eastern Zone

The Eastern Zone continues to present concerning results. The PRI presented positive growth between 2018/19 and 2021/22 but returned to a near record low of 0.09 undersize per pot-lift in the recent stock assessment. The Eastern Zone reacted to productivity concerns last year in setting a very conservative TACC under an aggressive rebuilding strategy. The RLRAG noted the importance of continuing with this rebuilding plan so as to not undermine the efforts of the last 12 months. This is considered the precautionary approach while the new harvest strategy is finalised and remains consistent with last year's TACC setting.



Travis Dowling
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