Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Fisheries**

Fish for the future

Bulletin No. 48 **June 2013**

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES PRODUCTION BULLETIN

WESTERN ROCK LOBSTER FISHERY – 2013/14 SEASON

FISHERY SEASON TO DATE

The total 'whites' catch derived from fishers' Catch and Disposal Record (CDR) forms for the period 15 November 2012 to 31 January 2013 was 2147 tonnes: 192 tonnes in Zone A (15 January 2013 to 31 January 2013), 804 tonnes in Zone B and 1151 tonnes in Zone C.

For the first time the Abrolhos Islands were open but coastal 'whites' catch (Zones B and C) was 1956 tonnes which was similar to last year's 'whites' but lower than historic levels.

Anecdotal evidence from fishers suggests that the 'whites' run was patchy and that the catches were generally down. Then again, this is not surprising as the puerulus settlement in 2008/2009, which gave rise to the 2012/2013 'whites' catch, was the lowest on record.

As with the current season, future seasons will not include a closure – fishing will be open year-round in all zones, including the Abrolhos Islands area.

Approximate production for 2013/14 season to date, plus percentage of total allowable catch taken is as follows:

	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C	Total
January	191208	148691	139241	**479140**
February	362795	156138	247448	**766381**
March	130937	140334	443612	**714883**
April	112110	186107	458299	**756516**
May	154798	322217	298240	**775255**
TOTAL	**951848**	**953487**	**1586840**	**3492175**
% of TACC taken	**88**	**50**	**62**	**63**

Before the late January/February moult (the timing of this moult would have varied throughout the fishery) catches were modest. Following the moult, catches picked up considerably and, according to anecdotal comments from fishers, most are happy with the level of catches. Catches, of course, vary throughout the fishery and are also dependent on swell, depth fished, and moon phase.

Satellite imagery indicates that sea surface temperatures have remained warm. Throughout the fishery catches in the shallows have generally not been good; this reflects poor puerulus settlement in the previous three to four years. This is also reflected in the relatively lower levels of A-sized lobsters in recent years recorded in the Processors Grade Category data.

The breeding stock is in a healthy position (throughout the fishery), together with large males. Fishers also report that this season they are seeing more undersize lobsters (reflecting an increase in settlement). All in all, a more optimistic outlook for the future.

Those fishers licensed to take octopus have done well, with good catches and good financial returns.

Very little fishing has occurred in the Capes region and Windy Harbour for western rock lobsters.

THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS FISHERY

During the early part of the Abrolhos Islands season, which this year started on 15 January, many boats fished in the area. Catches were good from the start for both those who fished in deep water for migratory animals and those that fished in the shallows, although some fishers commented that it was not as good as the previous season. However, it must be remembered that the 2012 Abrolhos season started on 15 March.

The Abrolhos deepwater or 'whites' run was 'short and sweet'. It occurred in very deep water (up to 100 fathoms plus) and resulted in some very significant catches for a select number of boats. The run petered out several miles short of the northern Abrolhos Line, where catches dropped rapidly.

RESEARCH DATA

Sincere thanks to fishers who have provided research data this season to the rock lobster team via the research section on the bottom of the CDR form. As always, please be assured that your efforts are well and truly appreciated and go a long way towards a better understanding of this important fishery.

So far this season approximately 23 per cent of fishers have provided research data, which is slightly down on last season's average of 27 per cent. Naturally, we would like more fishers to 'get on board' (no pun intended) and record their catches of breeding animals, undersize, etc. To this end we urge all those fishers who are not participating to have a go! The more information we receive, the better we are able to deal with the problems that may or may not arise in the fishery in the future.

Don't hesitate to call Eric Barker or Mark Rossbach on 9203 0111 if you have any queries. Feel free to drop into the WA Fisheries and Marine Research Laboratories at Hillarys for a chat, with coffee and tea provided free of charge.

PUERULUS SETTLEMENT

The 2012/13 puerulus collection season is over and puerulus settlement was still below the historical long-term average at all sites but back within the historical range of values. With the exception of the Rat Island and the Southern areas (Warnbro, Alkimos and Cape Mentelle), the numbers of puerulus observed showed a general improvement from the previous settlement periods. There appears to be a change in the timing of the peak of settlement, which traditionally occurred in August/September but now appears in November/December. At this stage, the earlier onset of spawning and the reduced winter storms provides the best explanation of the downturn in settlement and this is being investigated further. The historical trends can be seen in Figure 1.

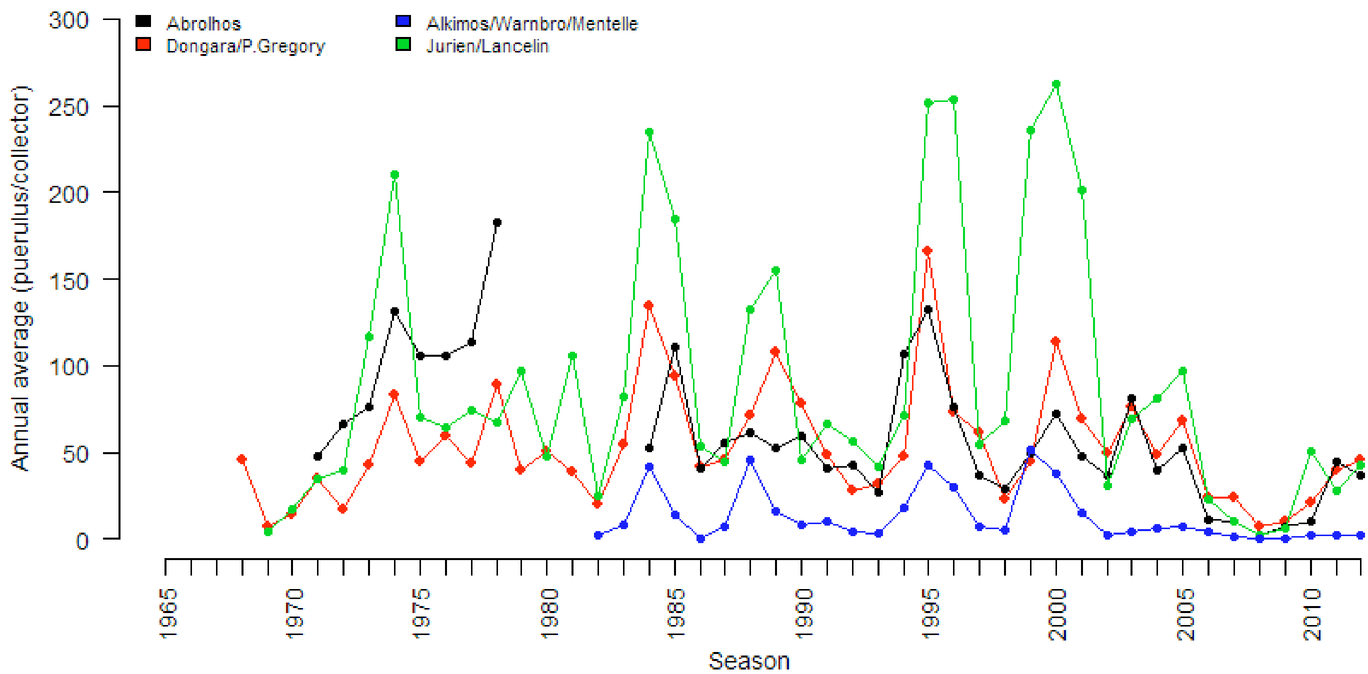

Figure 1. Annual indices of puerulus settlement for the Abrolhos, Northern, Central and Southern regions.

The current puerulus settlement information for 2012/13 is posted onto the Department of Fisheries website monthly so fishers can access the latest information as soon as possible. Visit http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Species/Rock-Lobster/Lobster-Management/Pages/Puerulus-Settlement-Index.aspx

The recruitment resulting from this year's settlement will be seen first in the catches of the 'reds' and then as 'whites' catches in 2016/17 under the new season structure.

ENSO NEUTRAL – A NEGATIVE IOD FAVOURED

The tropical Pacific has remained in a neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) state since mid 2012. All atmospheric and oceanic indicators of ENSO are currently well within neutral values. International climate models surveyed by the Bureau of Meteorology favour an ENSO-neutral state persisting into the southern hemisphere winter.

Following record high ocean temperatures around Australia during the summer, oceans have remained warmer than average, with January to April 2013 the warmest such period on record. Warm ocean surface temperatures around the continent may enhance local rainfall under favourable conditions.

The Southern Oscillation Index, or SOI, gives an indication of the development and intensity of El Niño or La Niña events in the Pacific Ocean (see Figure 2) and is currently neutral. The SOI is calculated using the pressure differences between Tahiti and Darwin.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) index is currently neutral. Model outlooks of the IOD are mixed, with three of the five models favouring the development of a negative IOD during the southern hemisphere winter-spring period.

Overall, a negative IOD event is slightly favoured over neutral conditions. A negative IOD during winter-spring increases the chances of above normal rainfall over southern Australia.

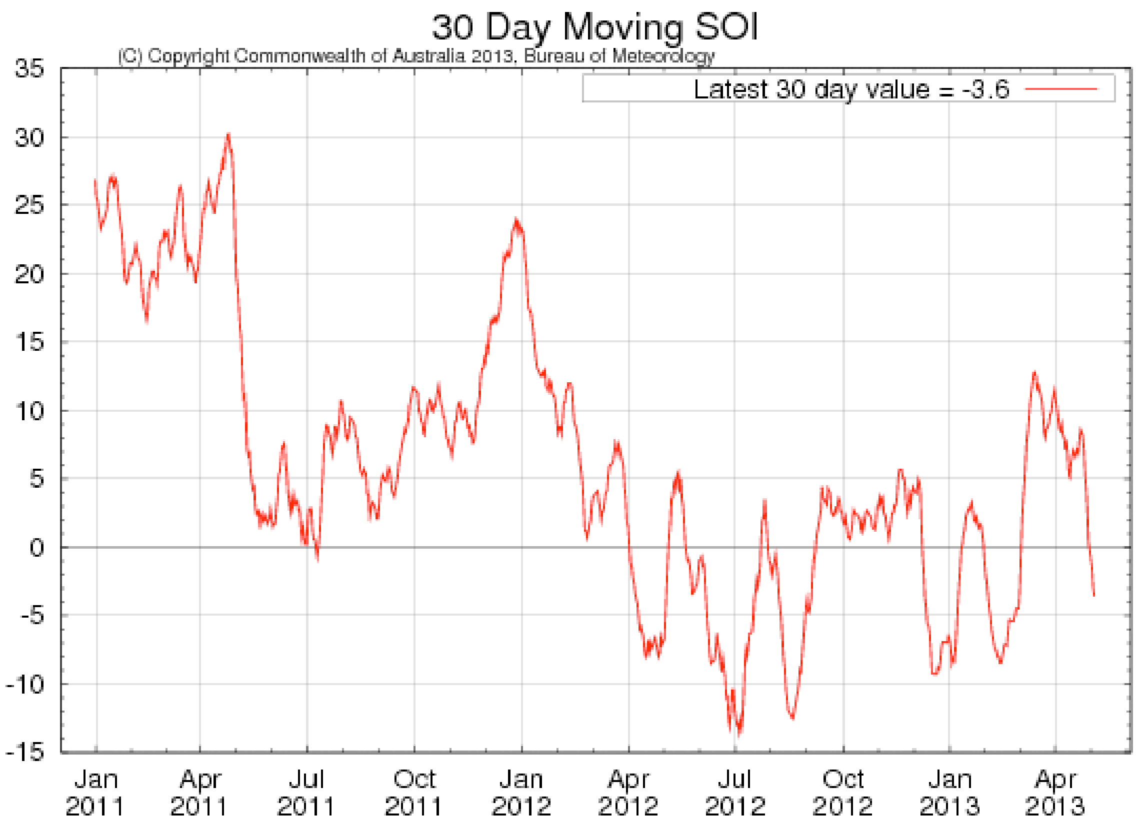

Figure 2. ***Southern Oscillation Index since Jan 2010 until Apr 2013 (data supplied by the Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology).***

MESH POT TRIAL

The meshed pot program has been running now for over 5 seasons and provides comparative catches of lobsters from a closed pot and an adjacent normal commercial pot for around 30 fishers each year. While the project was initially started to look at the distribution of small lobsters, it also has provided important catch information, including for the 'whites' migration. The 2012/13 'whites' was different to say the least. This poor run of 'whites' was not unexpected as they were comprised mainly of lobsters from the 2008/09 puerulus settlement, which was the lowest ever recorded. The difference in the 2012/13 'whites' was also evident in the location of where good catches were recorded. While the 2008/09 program did not have a large number of fishers it still recorded good catch rates throughout the areas that were fished. The following two seasons (2009/10 and 2010/11) also had good catch rates throughout the fishery. Catch rates of 'whites' in 2011/12 were patchier, but there were still some good catch rates. This is very different from 2012/13, when there were few good catch rates of 'whites' reported from the meshed pot program in the southern areas of the fishery (Figure 3). Those areas that did have good catch rates in the 2012/13 'whites' were also those areas that showed good catch rates of smaller lobsters (<65 mm CL) in the preceding season (Figure 4).

If you are interested in being a part of the meshed pot program please contact either Jason How (9203 0247) or Eric Barker (9203 0111).

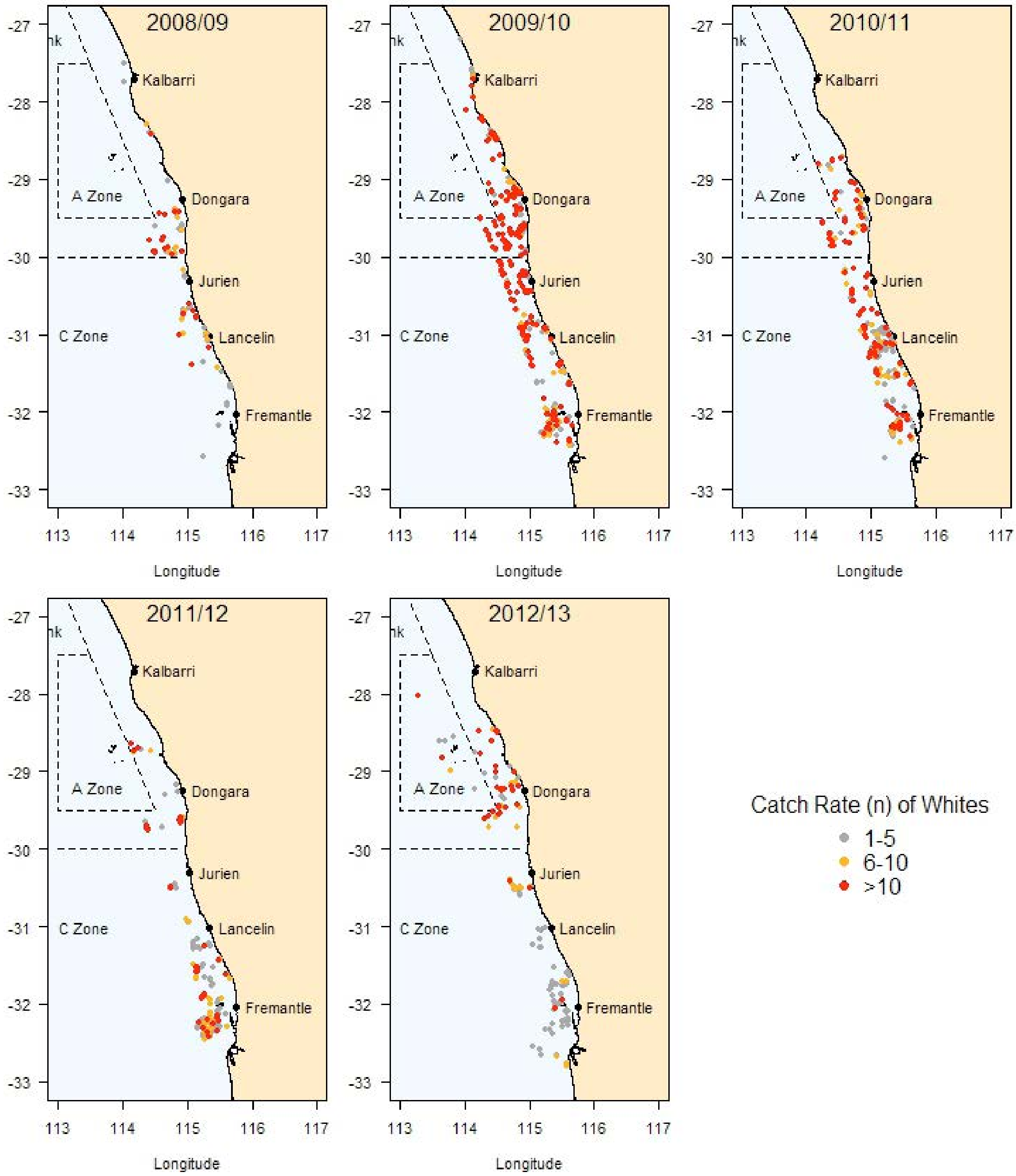

Figure 3. Catch rate (number/potlift) of 'whites' from the meshed pot program from 2008/09 – 2012/13. 'Whites' period is considered to run from November to January.

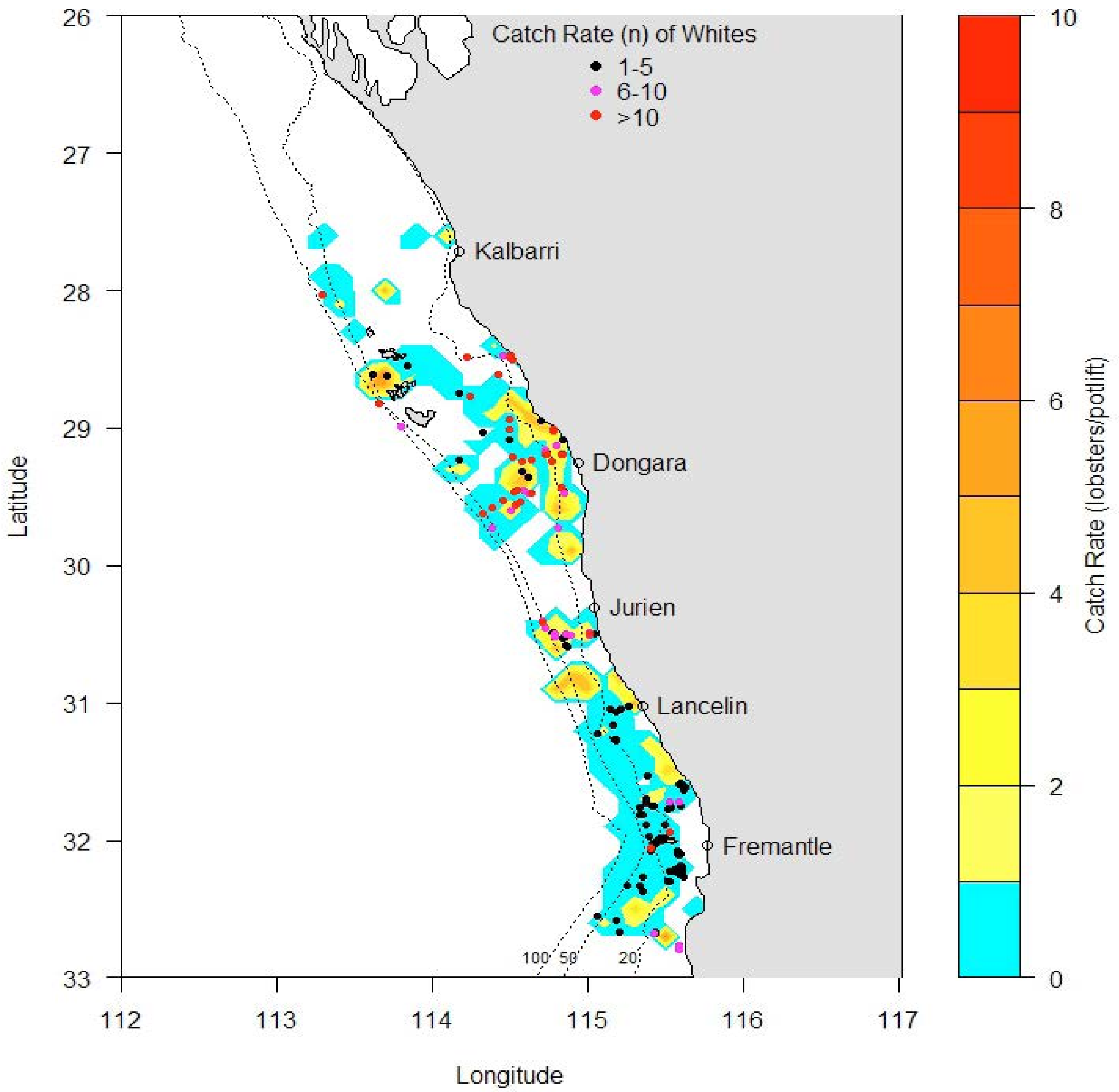

Figure 4. ***Catch rate (number/potlift) of small lobsters (<65 mm CL) from the 2011/12 season in coloured heat plot, with the catch rate of 'whites' from the meshed pot program from 2012/13 (dots).***

2013 SEASON MARKET REPORT* (FIRST HALF)

With the new West Australian lobster commercial fishing season beginning on 15 January for all zones including Abrolhos (Zone A – previously starting 15 March), international live markets were quickly filled.

LIVE MARKETS

Throughout the first half of the year, live prices in Western Australia were generally well above frozen levels, especially for smaller sizes under 700g. As a result, this gave processors very few opportunities to produce whole frozen product.

With the 'under-catch' from last season still fresh in fishers' minds, new-season fishing efforts saw many pushing to complete their quota as early as possible. To that extent, less target fishing and less high-grading was noticed, and accordingly, more larger sizes were represented in the catch mix.

Limited entry disruptions into China for the live lobster market saw live shipping volumes continuing to take account for most landings, even with increased production.

By late May, live market levels were increasing again as many fishers from northern zones had completed most of their quota and overall landings started to slow.

FROZEN MARKETS

Domestic-held inventories of frozen WA, east coast and imported lobsters were largely depleted by Easter and with continuing steady consumption, export frozen markets were limited to little or no stocks from Australia.

WA tail production stabilised by mid-year with an average of 5 – 6 per cent of total landings, largely as a result of products unable to meet daily live quality specifications. During peak landings, mid to larger sizes were somewhat difficult to move as live product and without whole frozen markets for the larger sizes, these were produced into tails (see table below).

Reported WA Lobster Commercial Production (Jan – April) By INPUT LIVE WEIGHT					
	2009 Jan 1 – Apr 30	**2010 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2011 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2012 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2013 Jan 15 – Apr 30**
Whole Cooked	679,161	408,670	314,580	67,973	90,930
Whole Raw	165,480	232,540	68,114	54,340	30,280
Raw Tails	497,334	324,576	209,204	103,433	167,320
Live	1,843,167	2,112,394	1,684,026	1,854,405	2,197,476
Total	**3,185,142**	**3,078,181**	**2,275,250**	**2,080,151**	**2,486,006**

Japan

As of February/March and with very little frozen WA stocks left in Japan, buyers sought out air-freights for whatever red and coral A/B sizes they could find. Most buyers, however, eventually gave up as they recognised pricing was generally unviable against domestic Australian levels.

This was made worse by the rapid depreciation of the Japanese Yen (JPY) against the US Dollar, which moved almost 25 per cent since late 2012 from 78 – 80 through to 99 – 102.

Whole frozen levels to Japan over the first half ranged from US$45 – 50/kg cost and freight (CFR) by air (red and coral A and B sizes) – prices in JPY values were almost 20 per cent higher than 2012. Higher offerings by WA packers were noted but were largely unable to tempt buyers.

Taiwan

Whole frozen levels to Taiwan over the first half ranged from US$41 – 48/kg CFR by air (A, B and C sizes).

While just a small handful of sea containers for whole frozen were shipped to Taiwan in December/January at mid $40s for A, B and C sizes, it was expected that a top-up would be needed by April/May. However, as April rolled by, interest from major Taiwan importers had evaporated as frozen inventories had barely moved.

Overall economic activity in Taiwan was fair and with many more exporters of high-value seafood preferring to focus efforts on China, Taiwan importers noted fewer trading competitors in this year.

Live demand from Taiwan for Australian lobster was noted only over the lead up to Chinese New Year (CNY) celebrations and of negligible influence to the overall market.

Hong Kong/China

With CNY 2013 celebrating the 'Year of the Snake' on 10 February, the outlook for live demand was anticipated to be similar to the previous year. These expectations were met.

Over the period, live prices again saw ranges between low $40s on the larger grades and $50 – $70+ on the smaller and medium grades, with pricing on whole frozen 400/700 g sizes usually well above frozen levels even during the highest landings.

The announcement of President Xi to rein in spending by government departments and State-controlled companies on luxury foods such as seafood banquets initially had very little impact on the top-end market. In March, however, many high-profile officials were named and punished for their ignorance of the new directive. Impacts of this policy at the moment seem to be more obvious in the live markets from Shanghai and north, and are said to be more likely to be felt by high-value frozen importers who take considerable positions in the months leading to CNY.

Regardless of the reduction of Government spending, the Chinese market continues to expand and new channels for live products are being identified.

Over 2013, there has been so far very little disruption to import channels, and export shipments to China for the period are at peak volumes.

Overall, global live lobster exports to China continue to grow, none more so than the live *Homarus* from Canada and the US. Live and whole-frozen production out of Florida and the Caribbean is also continuing to increase and impact further on the China market, and we can expect to see more of this from August through December this year.

Reported WA LIVE LOBSTER Commercial Production (Jan – April) By INPUT LIVE WEIGHT					
LIVE EXPORTS	**2009 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2010 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2011 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2012 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2013 Jan 15 – Apr 30**
% of catch	57.9%	68.6%	74.0%	89.2%	88.4%
Total	**3,185,142**	**3,078,181**	**2,275,250**	**2,080,151**	**2,486,006**

The US

Inventory within the US market was maintained at low but fair and balanced levels according to reduced sales options.

WA tail-selling levels remained steady at still between high $30s and low $40s (per pound). The WA tail-production outlook per season now looks to be ranging around 200,000 – 220,000 pounds, but with a drastically different size assortment than in previous seasons.

Caribbean spiny lobster *(Panulirus argus*) seasons are due to start again from mid-year with Brazil at 1 June and others from July/August. Due to significantly lower production over 2012, Caribbean tail inventories within the US market are light on all sizes and are expected to open higher than last season.

Reported WA Lobster Commercial Production of LOBSTER TAILS (Jan – April) By INPUT LIVE WEIGHT					
SIZE	**2009 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2010 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2011 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2012 Jan 1 – Apr 30**	**2013 Jan 15 – Apr 30**
A	35,205	18,879	20,593	4,331	5,816
B	179,933	115,598	47,624	21,874	29,054
C	111,721	72,922	39,578	20,869	32,031
D	122,207	70,086	62,778	31,289	33,101
E	28,489	24,381	13,357	12,367	28,774
F	8,703	13,965	10,643	5,643	17,499
G	8,003	8,205	6,389	4,569	17,635
H	3,072	540	3,241	2,490	3,409
Total	**497,334**	**324,576**	**209,204**	**103,433**	**167,320**

United States – Frozen Spiny Lobster Imports			
Year To Date: January – March (Kg)			
Country	Quantity		
	2011	2012	2013
World	2,208,405	1,885,671	1,989,358
Nicaragua	491,908	438,579	520,862
Bahamas	406,509	492,733	451,437
Honduras	547,112	409,552	440,222
Brazil	98,593	129,930	156,561
Colombia	28,360	40,645	50,621
St. Helena	85,075	74,184	50,098
Dominican Republic	78,498	59,655	42,995
South Africa	56,536	42,486	35,777
Australia	93,692	42,309	35,383
United Arab Emirates	9,677	0	31,520
Sri Lanka	0	11,667	29,945
Belize	38,575	40,063	26,285
Jamaica	15,441	17,019	24,144

Source of Data: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census

Australia

Domestic markets as in previous years have maintained the highest pricing and largest demand for frozen WA lobster sizes A, B and C. There have also been some new opportunities to include cheaper frozen and fresh chilled WA D sizes over 2013 as average prices for southern rock lobsters move higher again.

***This information was supplied by Mr Greg Hart of Wild Oceans Pty Ltd,**
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Except where acknowledged, the information in this bulletin has been supplied by the FISHERIES RESEARCH DIVISION of the DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES (WA). Contact Mr Eric Barker or Mr Mark Rossbach T: (08) 9203 0111 F: (08) 9203 0199.

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