

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 309
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Giant Freshwater Lobster (*Astacopsis Gouldi*) - Recovery Plan performance criteria
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 11 March 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Rice asked:

Have the following performance criteria been met for the listed short term objectives of the Plan?

a) Reduce and eliminate fishing pressure.

Fishing pressure on *A. gouldi* has been eliminated or reduced to a low level that is no longer considered a threat to population density or structure across its former range.

A community education and awareness program has continued. A high level of community awareness of *A. gouldi* management issues and support for conservation has been demonstrated.

b) Prevent and ameliorate habitat degradation

Areas of private land are being protected for *A. gouldi* conservation under cooperative mechanisms.

Effective habitat protection and rehabilitation measures have been developed and implemented for agricultural, forestry and other potentially damaging activities.

Protection of key areas (see Objective 3) has been progressed through available mechanisms such as private land covenants, public land reserves and Regional NRM strategies.

A community education and awareness program has continued. A high level of community awareness of *A. gouldi* management issues and support for conservation has been demonstrated.

c) Monitor and assess *A. gouldi* populations and habitats.

A survey of population abundance, recruitment, size structure, sex ratio and habitat characteristics has been conducted at a stratified set of sites using standardised methods. The surveys are incorporated into monitoring programs so that they are repeated every 5 years.

Monitored populations do not further decline and show recovery, measured in the short term by maintenance or increase in the populations' size range and numbers, and successful recruitment.

A comprehensive database has been established and is maintained on *A. gouldi* population abundance, recruitment, structure, habitat condition and distribution, to enable detection of trends.

Key areas requiring protection have been identified and documented.

d) Increase understanding of *A. gouldi* biology and conservation requirements to improve management.

Knowledge gaps have been addressed in the areas of adult and juvenile movement, environmental flow requirements, efficacy of Forest Practices Code provisions for *A. Gouldi* population protection, and genetic relationships between populations.

The information is applied in species management e.g. through Forest Practices Code provisions, management prescriptions, Water Management Plans and advice to landowners.

- e) Coordinate implementation of the recovery program.

The recovery program is effectively and efficiently implemented through coordination of actions and reporting.

Answer:

An assessment of progress toward the objectives of the *Giant Freshwater Lobster Recovery Plan 2006-2010* was undertaken by a panel of experts, including species managers, key scientists and other stakeholders at a workshop convened in Hobart in April 2015. In relation to these objectives, the experts at the workshop concluded:

- a) The objective to 'Reduce and eliminate fishing pressure' has been successful in terms of scale of impacts. Reductions in recreational fishing have been significant. Nevertheless, fishing may still be an issue in terms of small numbers of people engaged in significant poaching activity that may have a large impact. Fishing bans have been very effective for the species' recovery and need to be maintained, even if the species conservation trajectory were to improve significantly.

Community education and awareness raising was very effective in the early days of recovery plan implementation and resulted in strong community awareness for giant freshwater lobsters. There is potential to re-establish a community awareness program and promote the lobster as a flagship species when the new recovery plan is implemented.

- b) There has been good uptake in terms of private landholder interest in identification of the species on their lands and mechanisms to protect the species. Voluntary programs have been very successful and some covenants have been enacted.

There have been effective mechanisms developed for habitat protection in forestry areas, however the implementation of habitat protection measures varies in other sectors. In all sectors it will be important to continue to update habitat protection mechanisms in response to any future research that may detect new or emerging threats.

Many private land covenants have been entered into for the giant freshwater lobster or its habitat (particularly in the north-west), however future covenant programs would benefit from considering potential uptake in areas of the species distribution in the north-east.

- c) Good baseline monitoring was conducted for the giant freshwater lobster before and after the recovery plan was developed, and monitoring has continued to be regularly conducted. Preferred habitat characteristics for the giant freshwater lobster are relatively well documented. New genetic techniques could help reduce remaining knowledge gaps and assist in developing estimates of population abundance in the future.

An increase in the size of adult giant freshwater lobsters has been documented. This is suggestive of a recovery, as animals are presumably living longer on average. However, ongoing surveys need to be conducted in order to determine whether the overall number of giant freshwater lobsters has increased.

A database has been established and information is fed into the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment's (DPIPWE: Tasmania) Natural Values Atlas database on a regular basis.

Key areas requiring protection have been identified.

- d) Some knowledge of the movement of giant freshwater lobsters has been gained but further genetic studies will be useful in the future to understand the relationships between populations and the meta-population movements.

Some early research has been incorporated into current practices (especially for forestry). Research is continuing and the findings of new research will need to be incorporated into future management practices.

- e) Multiple stakeholders have contributed to the implementation of various recovery actions. The Cradle Coast NRM contributed to the implementation and financing of several actions, including survey work and community outreach. DPIPWE led the implementation of many actions, including actions relating to covenants and policy work. The Forest Practices Authority contributed to research projects and the development of new mechanisms to improve forestry practices in relation to the protection of giant freshwater lobster habitat. The Inland Fisheries Service undertook action relating to the implementation of the fishing ban.