



10 June 2020

Guy Barnett, Minister for Primary Industries and Water

Sea urchin harvest rates increasing

Protecting Tasmania's world class fisheries sector is a key priority for the Tasmanian Liberal Government.

The Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund (AIRF), supported by the Government and the Tasmanian Abalone Council, committed \$5.1 million over 5 years to help address the spread of long-spined sea urchin (*Centrostephanus*) into East Coast waters.

Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies researchers have now produced the first scientific assessment of Tasmania's growing long-spined sea urchin fishery.

The lead author of the IMAS fishery assessment for the 2018/19 season, Dr Katie Cresswell, said the annual catch remained below 100 tonnes for many years but ramped up after 2017, reaching 185 tonnes in 2018.

The report shows that the annual catch increased five-fold since harvesting began in 2009, with a catch increase in 2019 to 560 tonnes.

Promisingly, the catch rate over the past three seasons has exceeded the increase in urchin numbers.

This has underpinned commercial harvesting which reduces the spread of the destructive urchin, with some of the collected roe being sent to export markets.

The urchin can have devastating impacts on reefs due to overgrazing, which impacts kelp beds and reef dependent species such as abalone, rock lobster and fish.

Large rock lobsters are one of the few predators of long-spined sea urchin and through the successful East Coast Stock Rebuilding Strategy and the East Coast Rock Lobster Translocation Program we are rebuilding rock lobster stocks.

Sea urchin is one of the few export fisheries that has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Tasmanian Government continues to work with stakeholder groups to implement a comprehensive response strategy to tackle the spread of the long-spined sea urchin into East Coast waters.