

FISHERIES — JUVENILE FISH PROGRAM — FINE MESH BEACH SEINE NETS

**1197. Hon LYNN MacLAREN to the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to question without notice 1094, asked on 24 September 2015 and a notice titled “Cockburn Sound closed to crab fishing” on the Department of Fisheries website.

- (1) Please give details of the environmental and biological factors thought to be behind the recorded significant decline in numbers of blue swimmer crabs in Cockburn Sound.
- (2) Have juvenile blue swimmer crab numbers in Cockburn Sound declined, or is the decline only in the number of mature blue swimmer crabs?
- (3) What role does seagrass play in supporting the population of blue swimmer crabs in Cockburn Sound?
- (4) Please table the total number of blue swimmer crabs recorded over the past 10 years at each of the six sites sampled by the Department of Fisheries as part of its fine mesh beach seine survey program.

**Hon KEN BASTON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Several analyses are underway to investigate the cause of the continuing poor status and associated declines observed for the stock of blue swimmer crabs in Cockburn Sound. These include examining the potential influences on stock and recruitment dynamics from changes in primary productivity, predation levels and water temperature within Cockburn Sound. A revision of the egg production index using biomass dynamic modelling will also be done to ascertain if there have been changes in the carrying capacity of this stock since the late 1970s.
- (2) Both adult and juvenile crab numbers have declined to very low levels despite no fishing having occurred since May 2014.
- (3) Seagrass plays a vital role for this population as it provides the main habitat where juveniles reside.
- (4) No beach seine program is undertaken to assess the crab stocks in Cockburn Sound. Trawl surveys for juvenile crabs have been undertaken in Cockburn Sound since 2002. These results are presented each year in the West Coast Crab Section of the Department of Fisheries’ “State of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources” report. A table that has the annual juvenile catch rate indices generated from these surveys since they commenced is provided below.

I seek leave to have the table incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The following material was incorporated —

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Year	Catch Per Unit Effort
2002	1.05
2003	0.83
2004	0.08
2005	0.26
2006	0.08
2007	0.23
2008	0.39
2009	0.30
2010	0.90
2011	0.67
2012	0.73
2013	0.14
2014	0.02
2015	0.02

**Hon KEN BASTON:** The catch rate provides for a more robust comparison of the status of the stock over time than the total number of crabs caught. Given the complexity of this matter, I would be happy to arrange for a comprehensive briefing from my department.