

WESTERN ROCK LOBSTER FISHERY

**768. Hon RICK MAZZA to the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to a Department of Fisheries press release dated 15 January 2015, titled “Happy new year for commercial rock lobster fishers”, with reference to the relaxation of rules to allow commercial fishers to take large female lobsters and to retain setose lobsters on a trial basis from 1 July to 14 November this year, with an estimated profit improvement of \$15 million a year.

- (1) What monitoring is being conducted on the impact of this trial on the reproductive capacity of the lobster fishery?
- (2) What research is being carried out on the overall impact on the lobster fishery?
- (3) What modelling has been undertaken on the impact to profit ratio of taking setose females?

**Hon KEN BASTON replied:**

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

- (1) Stock assessment of the western rock lobster resource is subject to a comprehensive integrated modelling process, which includes data gathered from monthly puerulus settlement monitoring along the coast, annual breeding stock surveys carried out on at least seven sites throughout the fishery, and onboard commercial catch monitoring that includes collection of data on undersized lobsters and spawning females. Breeding stock throughout the fishery is currently at very high to record levels. Modelling indicates that removing the maximum legal length for females and permitting setose lobsters to be taken will not have a significant impact on the breeding stock, particularly given the conservative catch quota.
- (2) Management of the lobster resource is based on a harvest strategy, the central tenet of which is to maintain breeding stock across the fishery at a healthy level. The abovementioned monitoring programs are ongoing in order to ensure that this objective is met.
- (3) A bio-economic model that combines a stock assessment model with economic data has been used in this assessment. The suggested increase in profit as a result of permitting the take of setose lobsters is based on the estimated reduction in the cost of catching lobsters as a result of fishers being able to retain more of the lobsters that come up in their pots.