

# Mud Crab Research Update

*A biannual update on mud crab research  
in the Northern Territory*

*Edition 1: September 2005*

## The first edition

Welcome to the first 'Mud Crab Research Update'. This newsletter has been developed to provide regular updates on mud crab research being undertaken in the Northern Territory (NT).

If you would like to join the mailing list for this newsletter, please contact the Fisheries on 08 8999 2144, or e-mail: [fisheries@nt.gov.au](mailto:fisheries@nt.gov.au). Copies are available via post or e-mail. Alternatively, you can download this newsletter at: [www.fisheries.nt.gov.au](http://www.fisheries.nt.gov.au).

## Why study mud crabs?

Mud crabs (*Scylla serrata*) form the basis of one of the most valuable wild harvest fisheries in the NT. Indigenous, recreational and commercial fishers all harvest significant yields of this species.

The Fisheries Coastal Research Unit conducts a number of programs to collect the information necessary for ensuring the mud crab fishery is managed in a sustainable and equitable manner.

## Staff changes

Tracy Hay, the senior scientist of the Coastal Research Unit since 1996, recently vacated her position to move interstate. Michael Phelan, who was employed with the Coastal Research Unit during 2001-03, has been appointed to this position on a permanent basis.

## Final report released

Fisheries recently launched the final report for the study on 'Methods for Monitoring the Abundance and Habitat of the Northern Australian Mud Crab'. If you have not received a copy, please contact Fisheries on 08 8999 2144.

The 132-page report is the product of a three-year study conducted in partnership with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

The study produced survey and analysis methodologies to estimate mud crab density within rivers and tidal flats. The project also mapped mud crab habitats across the NT using remote sensing techniques.

Mud crab research in the Northern Territory is undertaken by the DPIFM's Fisheries with the assistance of commercial fishers and wholesalers.

## **Mud crab catch monitoring**

Each month, Fisheries staff measure and weigh a random portion of the commercial mud crab landings in order to monitor the state of the harvested stock. Between 100-200 mud crabs are examined from each region of the NT.

The preliminary results of this year's monitoring will be presented at the NT Crab Fisherman's Association (NTCFA) AGM. The complete data set will be presented in early 2006. Also in early 2006, the methodology adopted in this program will be reviewed to ensure the approach taken is the most suitable.

## **Logbook monitoring**

Each month commercial fishers and fishing tour operators provide logbook records to the Fisheries to assist in monitoring the state of the mud crab fishery. These records provide information such as the time and location of fishing, and the amount of fishing effort and landings.

The data provided in the logbook records is presented in the annual Mud Crab Fishery Status Report. The information is also used on a regular basis in a variety of decision-making processes. The preliminary results of this year's program will be presented at the NTCFA AGM.

## **Freight records**

In order to verify the information provided in the log book records, Fisheries staff cross-check claims against airline freight records. Mud crabs harvested in the NT are predominantly sold at interstate markets, allowing reported catch levels to be verified. The results of this year's program will be presented at the NTCFA AGM.

## **External assessment**

The mud crab fishery was assessed by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage in 2003 for compliance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The fishery received the highest level of accreditation.

As part of this accreditation, Fisheries is required to complete a number of tasks, including incorporating the outcomes of the recently completed 'abundance and habitat mapping' project into management arrangements for the fishery.

## **Future research directions**

With the recent completion of the abundance and habitat study, Fisheries is currently reviewing the needs of the mud crab fishery. As part of this process, the Coastal Research Unit is currently consulting the fishery's users and stakeholders. If you would like to contribute to this process, please contact the Coastal Research Unit on 08 8999 2144.

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