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2024/25 Preliminary Rock Lobster Assessment Summary

This is a brief summary of stock assessment results for circulation prior to the full fishery assessment results being released in late 2025. The full assessment will be released in dual form, both as an interactive assessment on the stock assessment website (tasfisheriesresearch.org) and as written assessment document (pdf). The results presented here are preliminary but unlikely to change substantially.

The southern rock lobster commercial TAC has been 1050.7t for the last eleven years, preceded by three years at 1103.24t. Over the last decade CPUE has risen substantially, primarily through two significant recruitment events in 2016-2017 and 2021-2022. In 2022-23, CPUE reached a multi-decadal high. It was the highest nominal CPUE since the early 1980s and the highest standardized CPUE since the introduction of consistent logbook in 2000. CPUE fell in the most recent 2024/25 season but remains high. The reduction in CPUE has been most significant in West coast areas.

Stock assessment modelling indicates that statewide egg production is at 45% which is well above the 30% limit reference point. This reference point has been set at a level below which subsequent recruitment may be impacted, hence is a critical limit reference point for ensuring sustainability.

An interim biomass target reference point had been set at 25% of the unfished biomass, this has been achieved with biomass currently estimated at 30%. The target reference point is reflective of the stock state desired by stakeholders for outcomes including sustainability, maximising economic rent and recreational amenity. The 25% target reference point is an extremely low value for a target relative to those used in most fisheries and was proposed as an interim target along a rebuild pathway. Now that it has been reached, a new target is being developed as part of the harvest strategy review that is currently underway and for which consultation is being undertaken.

Due to the long pelagic larval period (up to two years), egg production in different areas of the fishery is not closely linked to future recruitment in that region. Recruitment is affected by patterns in larval dispersal and the most important regions for larval sources are thought to vary from year to year. The appropriate management response to this is to ensure that healthy egg production of at least 20% of the unfished level is maintained in all areas. This is currently the case in all Tasmanian assessment areas. In recent years the only area falling under this had been King Island (area 5) but this was addressed through the increase in size limit.

Increasing CPUE has reduced the effort required to catch the TAC and hence the gap between lease price and beach price has narrowed. Consequently, competition for leased quota by fishers has become increasingly intense leading to a steady ongoing reduction in vessel numbers (down to 137 in 2024/25) and consequently employment.

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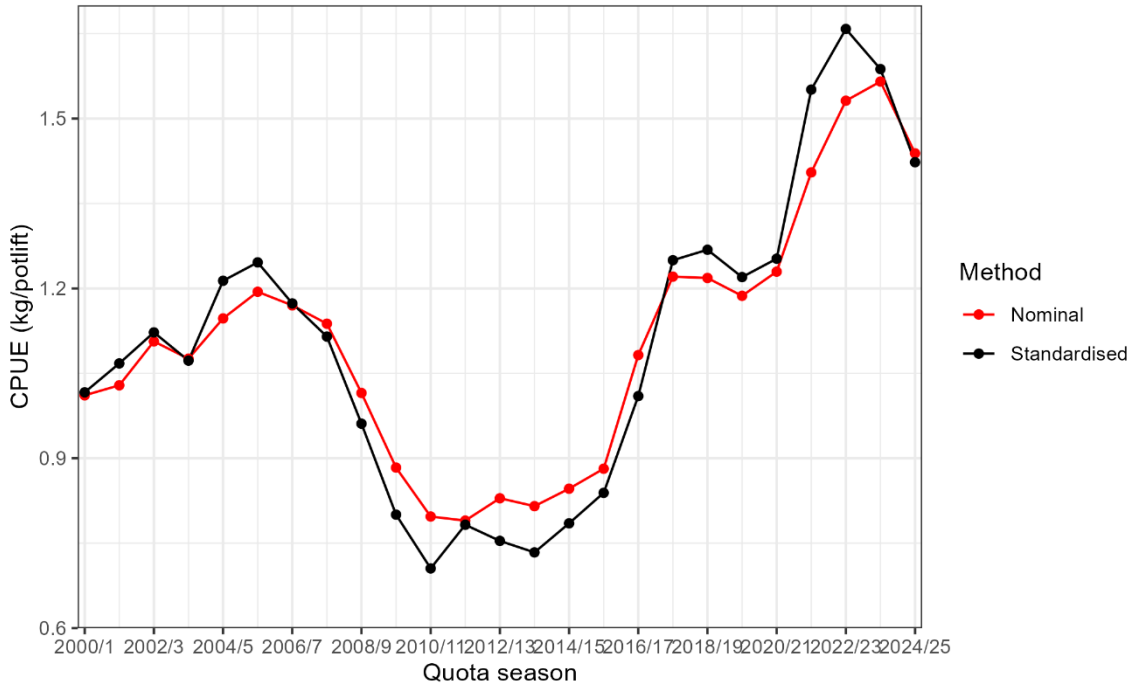

Figure 1: Nominal and standardised annual CPUE

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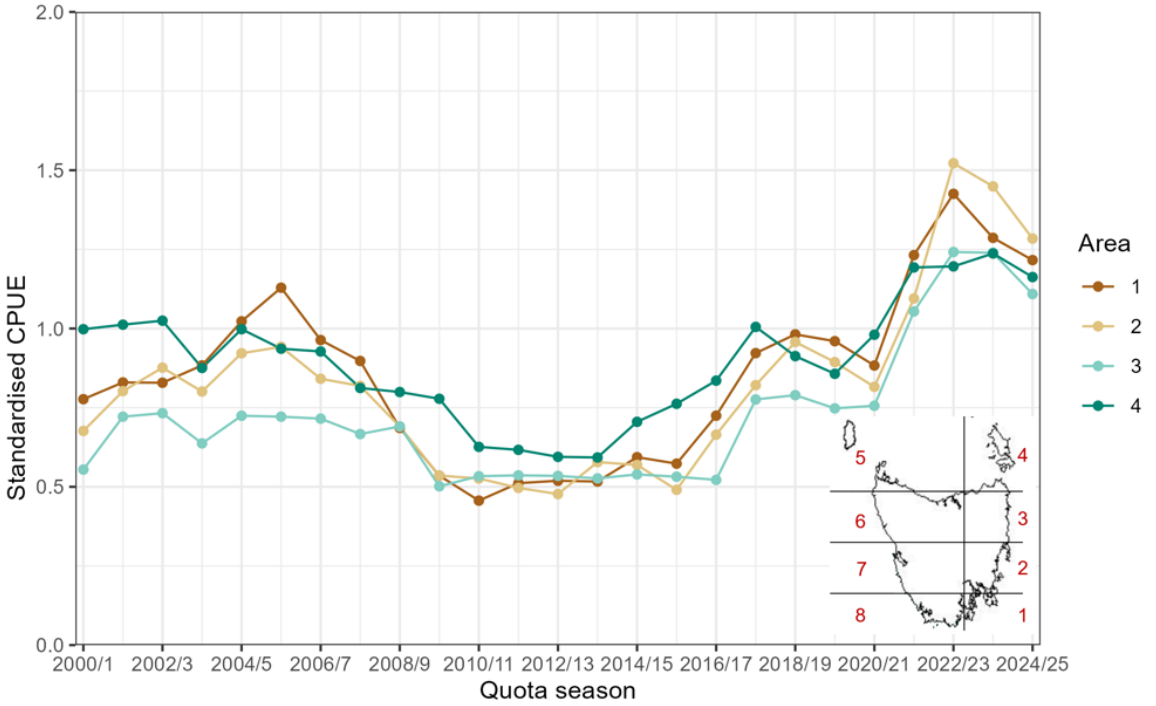

Figure 2: Standardised CPUE in the Eastern stock assessment areas

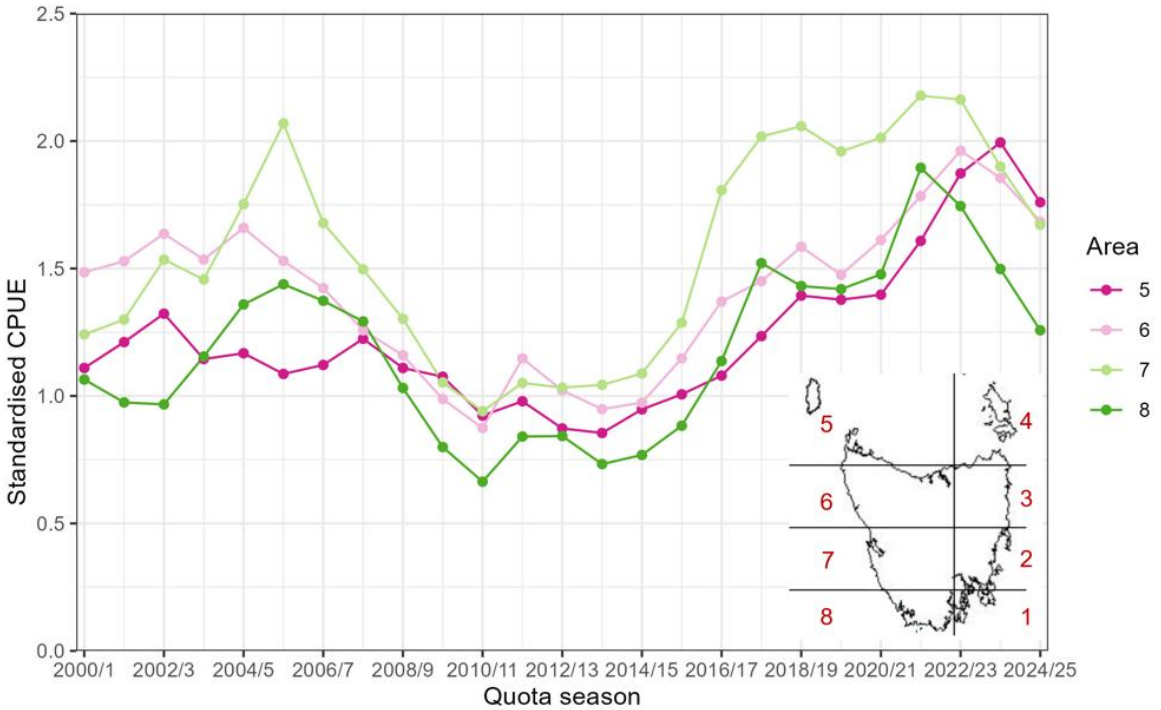

Figure 3: Standardised CPUE in the Western stock assessment areas

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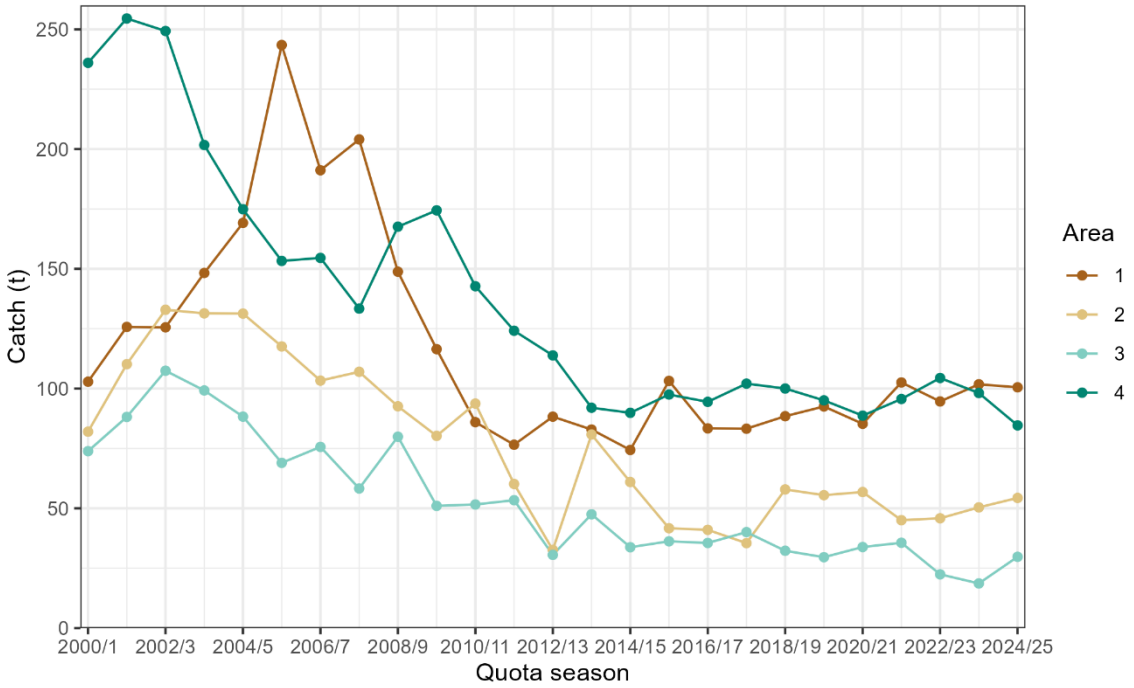

Figure 4: Commercial catch in the Eastern stock assessment areas

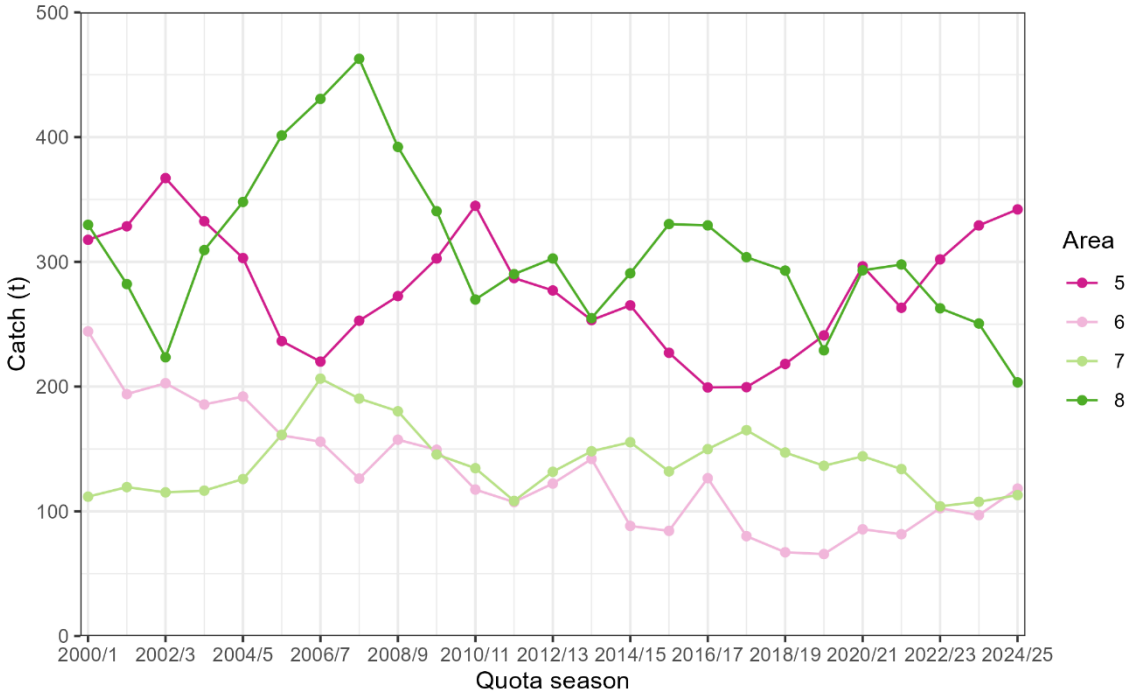

Figure 5: Commercial catch in the Western stock assessment areas

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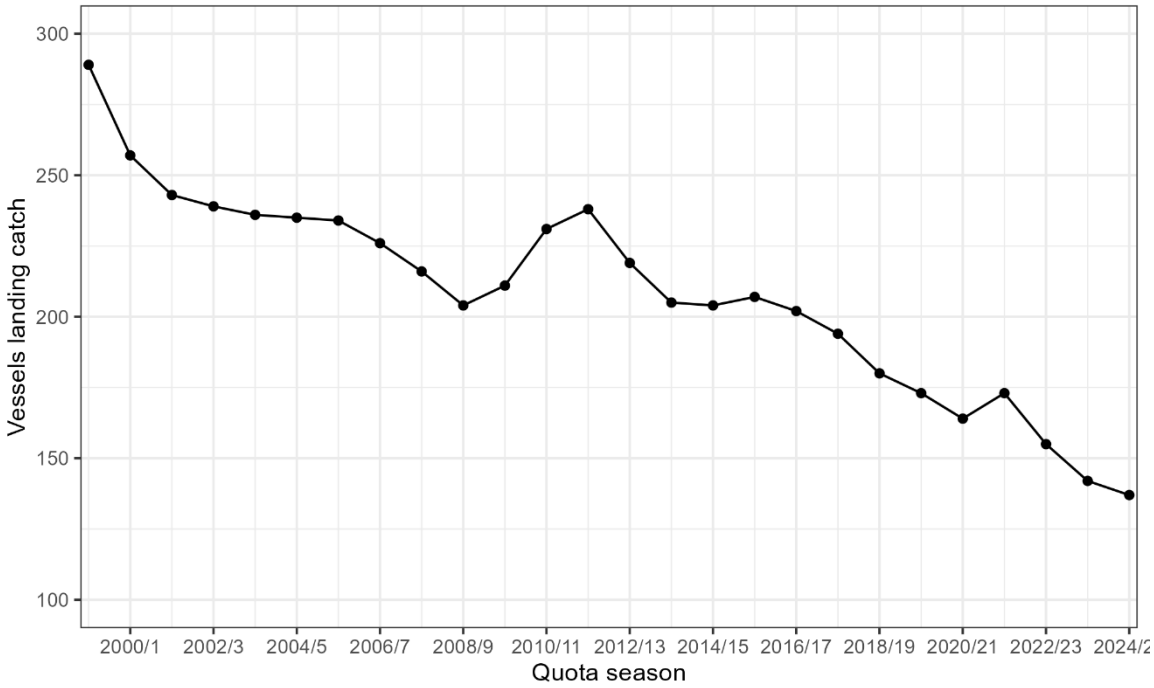

Figure 6: Number of vessels landing catch in each quota season.

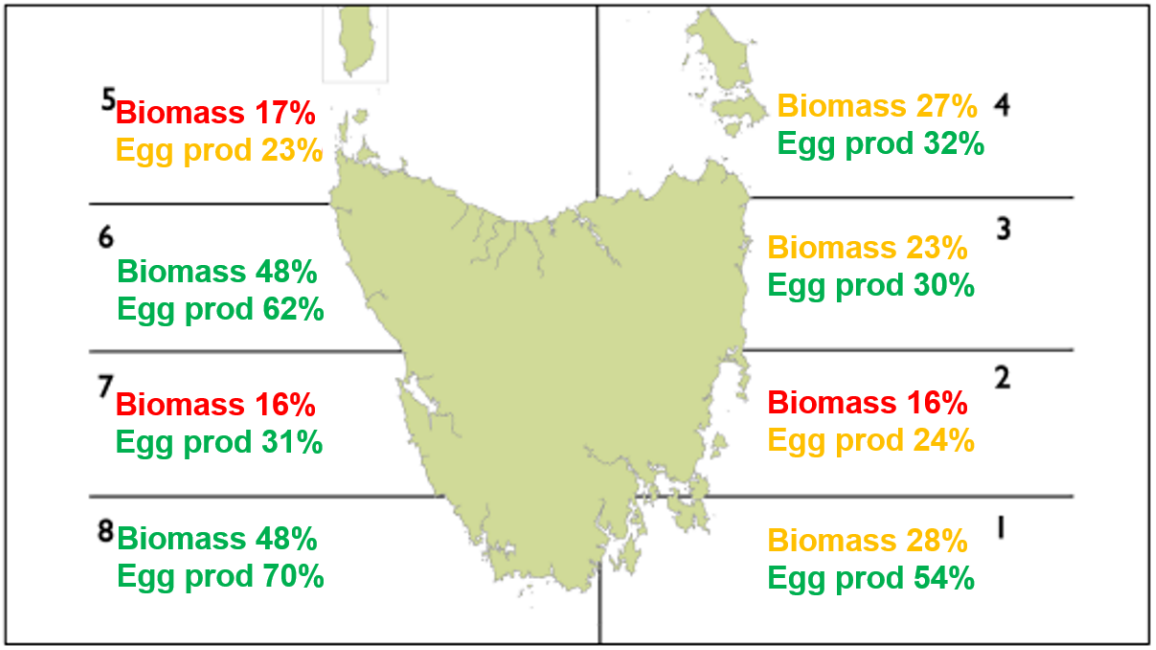

Figure 7: 2025 estimates of egg production and biomass (>60mm) compared to the unfished levels by stock assessment area. Note that small fluctuations from year to year due to model uncertainty are expected and small changes from the previous 2023/24 assessment are not necessarily indicative of trends in the stock. For more detail the individual area trajectories need to be considered in full.

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