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Minister applauds voluntary reduction in crayfish take

NZPA | Friday, 15 February 2008

The crayfish industry in the lower North Island plans to voluntarily reduce its catch this season.

Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton applauded the rock lobster industry's decision not to catch around 60 percent of its annual entitlement this fishing season starting April 1.

Last year, it reduced its catch to 44 percent of its entitlement.

Mr Anderton said crayfish levels were declining after being very high in the mid-1990s until about three or four years ago.

He said the industry was being responsible in reducing its take.

The fishery extends from the Wairoa River on the North Island's east coast, southwards along the Hawke's Bay, Wairarapa and Wellington coasts, through Cook Strait and north to the Manawatu River.

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0802/S00206.htm>



Minister congratulates crayfish industry

Thursday, 14 February 2008, 2:58 pm

Press Release: New Zealand Government

Hon Jim Anderton

Minister of Agriculture, Minister for Biosecurity
Minister of Fisheries, Minister of Forestry
Associate Minister of Health
Associate Minister for Tertiary Education

14 February 2008 Media statement

Minister congratulates crayfish industry

Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton today congratulated the rock lobster (crayfish) industry in the lower North Island after they announced their intention to voluntarily reduce their catch for the coming season.

The CRA4 Rock Lobster Industry has agreed not to fish around 60 percent of their annual catch entitlement for the new fishing season starting 1 April. This follows a voluntary commercial catch reduction of 44 percent in the current fishing year (April 2007 – March 2008).

“I applaud the CRA4 industry for their responsible action,” Jim Anderton said.

“This kind of responsible self-management within sustainable limits is exactly what the Quota Management System is all about. The industry is showing that their commitment to this fishery is for the long term; they are not about making a quick buck and moving on.

“It also shows the forward thinking and business savvy of the CRA 4 industry. Intelligent management like this is exactly what is needed to ensure New Zealand businesses remain competitive in the international marketplace,” Jim Anderton said.

“The information we have tells us that the CRA4 stock level is declining after being very high from the mid-90s through to three to four years ago,” Jim Anderton said. “Nevertheless, numbers are still well above the level where I would have concerns about the sustainability of the stock.”

“Research is undertaken on crayfish fisheries regularly. If a future stock assessment shows the CRA 4 stock has fallen, or is going to fall below acceptable levels I will take action and reduce catches,” Jim Anderton said. “It is my job to ensure the sustainability of our fisheries into the future.”

The CRA4 industry is acting to make sure their fishery is in good shape economically as well as biologically. In voluntarily reducing their catch, they are looking to increase the size and abundance of lobster available at peak catching times when export market prices are at their best, both in the coming season and also for future seasons.

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Background

The CRA 4 rock lobster fishery extends from the Wairoa River on the North Island’s east coast, southwards along the Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa and Wellington coasts, through Cook Strait and north to the Manawatu River.

* From the mid 1990s through the early 2000s, the CRA 4 fishery experienced a period of very high abundance, most likely due to high settlements of juvenile rock lobsters in the early 1990s.

* More recently, crayfish numbers in the CRA 4 fishery have declined. Research completed in 2005 showed abundance was still well above the level that would cause concern about the sustainability of the fish stock and prompt a move to cut catch limits.

* Forward projections of stock abundance undertaken in 2005 suggested numbers of crayfish in the CRA 4 stock would continue to decline if catch continued at the same levels but would likely (with 93%

probability) remain above the level that would cause concern about the sustainability of the CRA 4 fish stock.

* Quota owners in a fishery always have the option of collectively managing catch within the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (i.e. the catch allocated to commercial fishers by the Minister). The reasons for collectively choosing to reduce catches or “shelve Annual Catch Entitlement” include:

* To improve the economic performance of the fishery – sometimes economic returns are better if more fish are left in the water, because this improves catch rates and reduces the costs of fishing.

* To avoid a cut in catch limits – if abundance in a fishery falls below the level required by law the Minister has an obligation to reduce catches – fishers will sometimes act voluntarily to retain the fishery above this level and avoid catch limit reductions.

* If the stock falls below the “reference level” the Minister is obliged by law to cut the Total Allowable Catch (the TAC) and reduce associated catch allowances as appropriate – voluntary catch reductions cannot be used as a substitute for the Minister taking this action.

ENDS

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0802/S00209.htm>



New King Salmon farm will be watched closely

Thursday, 14 February 2008, 3:18 pm

Press Release: Green Party

14 February 2008

New King Salmon farm will be watched closely

Green Party MP Metiria Turei has expressed strong concerns over the opening of a new King Salmon Company Salmon Farm which was attended by the Prime Minister today.

The King Salmon Company are known for their genetic experiments eight years ago which resulted in modified fish eggs possibly having been released into the wild due to mesh size being larger than the size of the smallest eggs, and the growth of mutant salmon.

"Although King Salmon have said that they will not continue with their GE programme, they need to answer questions around their continued storage of GE material," Mrs Turei says.

"The Green Party welcomes King Salmon Company's assurances that they are focussed on reducing their impact on the environment, but we encourage the Prime Minister to ask some hard questions about how exactly they intend to achieve this.

"Apart from King Salmon's historically casual attitude to safe environmental practices, there are other problems that are associated with intensive fish farms.

"Both international experience and reports from locals indicate the seabed beneath salmon farms becomes heavily polluted with anaerobic material - basically huge quantities of fish poo - and several of the farms have become unworkable for this reason. Clearly this pollution will also affect surrounding sea life.

"These farms also represent a very poor economy in terms of protein conversion. Often farmed salmon are fed with wild fish which are too small for human consumption but which are commercially viable when processed into salmon feed.

"Trawling for Pilchard in the sounds, which are used to feed the salmon, limits the food available to dusky dolphins. Harvesting these fish creates new pressures on marine systems, even as other fish stocks, such as orange roughy, blue cod and oreo, reach collapsing point through overfishing.

"Animal welfare is another concern. These farms are known for their high stocking rates, which lead to fish stress and abrasion as they continually compete for space.

"However, as this farm has been developed in partnership with local iwi, the hope is that will lead to greater interest in protecting the local environment and stronger consideration of the principle of kaitiakitanga than King Salmon have previously shown."

ENDS

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/science/two-new-shark-species-found/2008/02/14/1202760479219.html>



Two new shark species found

February 14, 2008 - 5:08PM

Two new species of wobbegongs, otherwise known as carpet sharks, have been found in Western Australian waters.

WA Department of Fisheries shark researcher Justin Chidlow said there were now eight known wobbegong shark species in Australia.

The new floral banded wobbegong has been spotted between Geraldton and Augusta and the new dwarf spotted wobbegong was found in shark fishery catches between Green Head and Mandurah, Mr Chidlow said.

Wobbegongs, which are often sold in fish shops under the name of carpet shark, are probably the most common shark species seen by divers.

"It's amazing to think that the new species have been present off our coast, but that it's only now that they have been formally identified as separate and been added to the list of known wobbegong species," he said.

"Wobbegongs were not as sleek looking as some of the better-known sharks and the new species helped reinforce the importance of the continental shelf off WA as an area where a large range of wobbegong species could be encountered."

The colour of the floral banded species is mainly dark brown with yellowish blotches on the upper surface and white on the underbelly, whereas the adult of the dwarf spotted wobbegong was a lighter yellowish brown with large white blotches on top and creamy coloured underneath.

AAP

Panel claws its way to blue crab-restoration proposal

By [Scott Harper](#)

The Virginian-Pilot

© February 14, 2008

NEWPORT NEWS

Almost everyone agrees the Chesapeake Bay blue crab is in serious trouble, even teetering on collapse. But finding a remedy is another story.

Take Tuesday night. After five hours of debate that ended shortly before midnight and included shouting, accusations and near-exhaustion, a state advisory panel grudgingly endorsed a slate of reforms on how and when Virginians can harvest blue crabs from the Bay and its tidal rivers and creeks.

Still, some questioned whether the changes - even if adopted and enforced - would do much to restore the state's most celebrated seafood species, whose abundance has fallen 70 percent in the past 15 years, according to scientific estimates.

"A lot of what we're proposing may not be worth the paper they're written on," said Pete Nixon, a Norfolk crabber and president of the Lower Chesapeake Bay Watermen's Association.

Chief among the recommendations is one that would cut the number of crab traps and pots allowed in the Bay by between 10 percent and 30 percent, beginning this year.

In addition, the Blue Crab Advisory Committee recommended that:

- n no-harvest sanctuaries be extended two extra weeks each spring, to better protect adult females swimming toward spawning grounds in Hampton Roads;

- n an extra escape hole, or cull ring, be required in crab pots statewide, to allow smaller, developing crabs to continue living and breeding;

- n the state crack down on the practice of "agents" and "permit stacking," in which watermen loan their crabbing licenses to family, friends or hired workers, who then collect and sell crabs and share the profits.

The meeting Tuesday was described as the first step in a long and undoubtedly painful process toward adopting a new way of managing crabs in both Virginia and Maryland.

The two Bay states are wrestling with record-low harvests and failing strategies to reverse the trends. Maryland, too, is eyeing changes in its prized crab fishery and is brainstorming for potential solutions.

The underlying purpose of the Virginia reform package is to curb fishing pressures on weakened crab stocks, which also are stressed by pollution, lost habitat and predator fish, such as striped bass, croaker and catfish.

The state Marine Resources Commission will consider, and perhaps vote on, the package at its meeting Feb. 26 in Newport News.

Drawing on the conclusions of a scientific panel that spent the past year studying the problem, Virginia fisheries director Jack Travelstead said restoring crab populations must touch three pillars: controlling the number of people in the fishery, the number of pots in the water, and the amount of time spent fishing.

"The concern is that if we don't take additional measures," Travelstead said, "we could drop below the thresholds from which we cannot guarantee a recovery."

Scientists have defined sustainable crabbing levels - no more than 46 percent of the Bay's population should be taken each year, they say - but Virginia has crossed that line in 12 of the past 16 years, Travelstead said. "We have no choice but to react to that."

A favorite target of conservationists is the winter dredge fishery, in which watermen capture female crabs buried in the mud off Norfolk and Virginia Beach. The theory goes, if this practice were stopped, more females would survive and spawn babies the next spring.

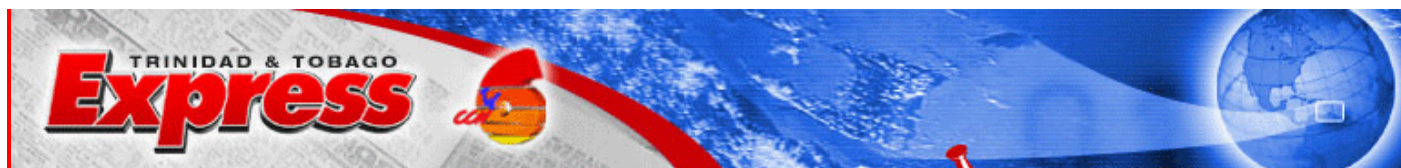
But scientists and state officials said dwindling interest in dredging in recent years has cut winter catches to insignificant numbers. Noting that fewer than 50 work boats are harvesting crabs in this way this winter, they recommended no changes.

"Dredging this winter has been awful," said Pete Freeman, a Hampton Roads resident who has crabbed for more than 60 years.

Rick Robins, a seafood merchant and chairman of the state crab advisory committee, said the reforms discussed Tuesday are just the short-term measures that should be addressed. "What we don't want are more Band-Aids," he said, noting that Virginia has imposed 22 regulations since 1994 to restore crabs, to no avail.

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http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_news?id=161277934



Dolphin eaters warned of diseases

Kimberly Castillo
Thursday, February 14th 2008

WITH recent news reports suggesting that dolphin meat is a hot seller at some fish markets, consumers are now being cautioned to think twice before they try the meat.

Veterinarian and coordinator of the Trinidad and Tobago Marine Mammal Stranding Network, Dr Wade Seukeran, said not only are dolphins exposed to high levels of contaminants and pollutants such as mercury and lead, they may also have diseases which can be easily transferred to human beings upon consumption.

"Mammals such as dolphins and whales are high up on the food chain and even though contaminants have been found in regular fish, imagine what happens when dolphins who are already exposed to pollutants eat these fish-in that case the contaminants they ingest are extremely concentrated," he said.

Gary About, secretary of Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, echoed similar sentiments. "Scientific findings done years ago showed heavy metal poisoning in dolphins but in Trinidad and Tobago, everything is for sale that is why we are seeing endangered mammals being sold in the open at fish markets. What we are seeing is not Vision 2020 but barbarism 2020," said About.

Seukeran's beliefs also coincide with international findings that have revealed that dolphin meat may be unhealthy. According to a CNN report, the Japanese government in 2005 said that bottle nose dolphins contain 12 times more mercury

than bluefin tuna.

The report also indicated that high levels of mercury in fish can cause health problems in pregnant women and children. Another of Seukeran's concerns is that when dolphins are caught, they are not inspected, this, he said only increases health concerns associated with dolphin meat.

"We would not eat meat like beef that wasn't inspected. When the dolphins are caught, their meat is not inspected and so there are high chances the meat is not fit for consumption," he added.

Seukeran pointed out that while the harvesting and consumption of dolphin is tradition among certain cultures, dolphins should not be seen as a source of food in our society.

<http://narooma.yourguide.com.au/news/sport/general/the-divers-log/1181912.html>

Narooma News

13 February 2008 - 2:12PM

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The Divers Log

Bill Barker



Stunningly coloured horseshoe leatherjackets.

Montague Dive Club

With sea conditions in our waters continuing to be more suitable for surfing than scuba diving, Andrew Green and I were lucky to have an opportunity a couple of weeks ago to travel down to Flinders Island in Tasmania to do a training course in how to do scientific surveys of the marine environment.

The course is part of an Australia-wide program that will train divers in all states to do this kind of research in a scientifically valid way.

The rationale is that marine research is difficult and expensive and, if it depends solely on professional scientists being available, much less data will be gathered and at much greater cost.

As we have seen this summer, the weather is fickle and it is much better to have researchers on site, ready to take advantage of favourable conditions to get out at short notice and conduct the needed surveys.

So under the supervision of renowned marine scientist, Dr Graham Edgar of the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute, recreational divers are being trained in applying a methodology that will be both practical and scientifically valid.

Andrew and I intend to carry out several dozen dives each year in our waters, gathering information on what is there and importantly what changes take place over time, particularly in the Marine Park area.

Other divers will do the same in marine protected areas and elsewhere throughout Australia; and indeed, in other countries when the opportunity arises.

As divers, the training was a great opportunity to visit a part of Australia that is well off the normal divers' beaten track. We were

excited to find a marine environment off Flinders Island that is quite different to that which we are used to on the South Coast.

In our waters, more than 50 per cent of the near shore reefs are comprised of so-called 'urchin barrens', which contain black sea urchins, a thin coating of algae on the rocks and a limited fish fauna. There are many variables influencing the structure of marine environments but it is thought that a contributing factor in the spread of urchin barrens is the reduction in numbers of urchin predators such as snapper, other large fish and lobsters in our waters.

The west coast of Flinders Island does not have black sea urchins (at least not yet) and the reefs were covered with a lush growth of weed, sheltering large numbers of fish and invertebrates.

Our training course was quite rigorous. Each day for a week we were out on the boat in sometimes rough seas.

Every dive involved laying a 50 metre tape, identifying, counting and sizing every fish in the vicinity and then picking our way through the dense weed cover looking for large invertebrates.

Abalone lovers would have been in their element, as on some dives we saw dozens the size of dinner plates. We took many photos of the bottom, which will be analysed using a computer to assess the weed cover. Back on land we continued our work, learning how to enter the data consistently into a central database.

Over the coming years, our contribution to scientific data gathering will complement that being done regularly on behalf of the Marine Park Authority.

The Dive Club is also doing fish surveys under the 'Coastkeepers' program of the National Parks Association of NSW and in addition, the Nature Coast Marine Group has (in collaboration with Marine Park Management) developed a methodology for local snorkelers to carry out marine life surveys.

Anyone interested in joining the dive club or learning to dive, please contact Bill Barker on 4473 5304 or hri@acr.net.au. You just have to be reasonably fit, comfortable in the water and interested in marine life.

- Bill Barker



<http://www.theage.com.au/news/environment/no-compo-for-firms-affected-by-dredging/2008/02/12/1202760300891.html>

No compo for firms affected by dredging

Clay Lucas
February 13, 2008

THE Brumby Government will not force the Port of Melbourne to pay compensation to small businesses hit by the effects of its \$1 billion channel deepening project.

Dive companies met the Port of Melbourne yesterday to discuss paying compensation to their businesses, which they said were already being affected by the dredging.

Diving businesses in Sorrento and Queenscliff, which rely on clear waters to attract tourists, said visibility underwater had dropped since dredging began from around 20 metres to 1.6 metres at times.

Jason Salter, from the Dive Victoria Group, said visibility was still excellent when the tide was coming in and water was pouring into the bay from Bass Strait. "But when the tide is going out, and the crap in the water coming from the dredge is leaving the bay, visibility is terrible. The closer you get to the dredge the worse visibility is.

"It's only a matter of time before people stop coming."

Port of Melbourne channel deepening project manager Nick Easy confirmed yesterday that plumes stirred up by dredging were causing the cloudiness in the water. If divers did not like the water quality, they should dive elsewhere, he said.

"There are many diving locations around Port Phillip Bay," he said.

Mr Easy said no compensation would be offered to dive companies or other businesses hurt by the Port's dredging campaign, which will finish in December 2009.

"The Port has been very clear on its position on compensation," he said. "The avenues available for industries affected are through the legal system. No (other) avenues exist at this time."

Opposition Ports spokesman Dennis Napthine said it was "outrageous" the Brumby Government was not forcing the Port to set up a compensation fund for businesses hurt by dredging.

He called on Premier Brumby to set up a compensation fund similar to one established by the Kennett government when it banned scallop fishing in the bay.

Tourism Alliance Victoria, a group representing 93 tourism businesses who are reliant on Port Phillip Bay, also said yesterday the Port should set up a compensation fund.

"With the Port saying there will be no compensation unless we sue ... the only winners in this will be the legal fraternity," chief executive Anthony McIntosh said.

Ports Minister Tim Pallas said the Port of Melbourne Corporation was taking various measures to mitigate potential impacts on the diving industry.

"For example, by establishing a dive industry liaison group," he said. "The Port is required to consult with any businesses affected by the project and impacts will be monitored."

Mr Pallas, asked about whether his Government would follow the Kennett government's example and set up a compensation fund, said: "Unlike the Liberals/Nationals, the Brumby Government has no intention of revoking people's right to take legal action through the courts."



Victoria's sultans of spin try to mask growing problems

Ken Davidson
February 14, 2008

The Government's intentions statement is an insult to voters.

YESTERDAY, in a joint sitting of the Federal Parliament, we saw the best a parliament has to offer as the leaders of the major parties accepted responsibility on behalf of the nation by saying sorry to the stolen generations.

Last week we saw the worst a parliament has to offer in a joint sitting of the Victorian Parliament initiated by the Brumby Government to present what is planned to be an "Annual Statement of Government Intentions".

The statement was so utterly threadbare that the demonstrations both inside and outside the Parliament against channel deepening, the desalination plant and the north-south pipeline that dominated the ensuing news reports were probably a blessing in disguise for the Government, which is giving increasing signs that it is struggling in several key portfolios.

It is also a government that is responding to growing electoral criticism by demonstrations of petulance such as suggesting that if the opponents of channel deepening have their way, Melbourne could end up a backwater like Adelaide.

This is no answer. The quickest way to make Melbourne a backwater is if major ecological damage is done to Port Phillip and the mouth of the Yarra River. A sensible government would have undertaken a public survey of all the

environmental risks of channel deepening and the economic options, including bringing containers into Melbourne by train.

And, as with far too many other infrastructure decisions, the channel-deepening decision was taken first and then it became a process of rationalisation.

This means that statutory processes such as environmental impact assessments tend to be micro-managed so that they achieve the right results and opponents of the decision can never be reconciled because they believe process has been corrupted.

The Brumby Government has ceased being the servant of the voters and has become their masters, managing public opinion with spin and justifying its decisions based on what it argues is superior understanding of the issues. Of course, this claim to superior understanding is based on tight control of information which, in most cases, is shared with the corporate interests directly involved in profiting from the decision.

The exercise of unaccountable power reached a point of high farce last week in the intentions statement, which the Government claimed was designed to increase its accountability to the state. As Opposition Leader, Ted Baillieu rightly pointed out that what the Government has planned is a new bureaucracy, which will set out Brumby's intentions in an annual report that will be dumped in the last week of parliament along with every other annual report that this Government puts together.

In his response, Liberal transport spokesman Terry Mulder told Parliament that given that the presentation of the document required the attendance of both houses of Parliament, it should have something in it. Indeed, it delivered nothing except "project facilitation legislation to provide a streamlined regime to facilitate the delivery of crucial road and rail infrastructure through the passage of new project facilitation legislation".

In other words, he said, a new bureaucracy designed to fast-track new infrastructure with even less public examination than exists now.

"We are going to get more fat cats, more consultants and more Labor hacks. Imagine how they will spend their next 12 months. There will be offices to rent in Collins Street Towers. There will be a new board and government-appointed chairman.

"This is what the government has planned — another regime to sit over all these other government transport-related agencies, referral bodies and community organisations — because we have two ministers who are not up to it."

Genuine open government where timely and real information flows easily between government, experts and voters, will not solve all our problems, but it will minimise the chance of really bad decisions, and hence improve the electability of incumbent government.

Ken Davidson is a senior columnist.

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<http://www.sciencealert.com.au/features/20081402-16900.html>



Giant shark gets a black-box flight recorder



By Julian Cribb



The tags will provide insight into a whale shark's lifestyle.

In 2008 the secret life of one of the Earth's largest and most mysterious creatures, the whale shark, will be laid bare for the first time when some of the gentle giants off Western Australia's coral coast at Ningaloo are equipped with 'black box flight recorders'.

The project is the result of a collaboration between two Laureates of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise – Australian Brad Norman who set up the world's first photo-ID system for identifying whale sharks and Briton Rory Wilson, who has developed the world's most sophisticated device for monitoring the activity of animals in the wild.

Wilson says his logger, which weighs only 30-48 grams, is like an aircraft black-box flight recorder that monitors changes in speed, altitude and heading. At its heart is a tiny electronic device that measures changes in an animal's acceleration in every direction – forward/back, up/down or sideways. This accelerometer measures motion along all three axes up to 32 times a second, and, combined with a compass, determines the animal's speed, direction and position. It can do many things that widely-used animal tracking systems using GPS (Global Positioning System) cannot, such as operate in dense forest, underground or in the ocean.

All animals spend energy to keep warm, digest food, and maintain vital functions like breathing and pumping blood – but movement requires energy expenditure ten times higher. "An animal that's not expending energy is dead," Wilson says. Animals burn glucose to generate energy, consuming oxygen in the process, so by measuring an animal's oxygen intake in a sealed chamber called a respirometer, scientists can estimate how much energy it consumes just staying alive and warm, and how much it requires while walking, running or swimming.

Wilson and his colleagues have already used the logger to record energy expenditure in wild cormorants, and were thrilled when their data corresponded to the figure predicted from trials determining the average oxygen consumption of five great cormorants tested in a respirometer. Zoologists can now use Wilson's black box to estimate how much energy an animal expends flying, swimming, hunting, digging, feeding, fighting or mating. Adding these figures to the baseline energy needed to stay alive and warm gives a reliable estimate of the species' total energy expenditure.

This information will revolutionise wildlife studies. By measuring the energy content of a species' natural diet, zoologists will know how much time a carnivore must spend hunting, or how long a herbivore must graze, to keep up its strength, grow and successfully breed – the ultimate aim of the game of life. "A

successful animal,” says Wilson, “is one that takes in a lot more energy than it expends. Many conservation issues involve animals that are expending too much energy. Energy for an animal is like money for a human, but if an animal overdraws its budget, it dies. We haven’t had a way of measuring energy expenditure in wild animals before.”

Data about animals’ energy expenditure will help conservationists understand what constitutes poor, average or optimum living conditions, or what minimum area is needed for an individual or population of animals to survive and do well. The logger could help resolve important conservation questions - such as whether climate change, predation or over-fishing in its hunting grounds is responsible for an observed decline in the case of of the African penguin.

Wilson and fellow zoologists have recently tested the black box on species in Argentina, including imperial cormorants and armadillos. The device has also been trialled on wild beavers in Norway and the badgers of Wytham Woods in Oxfordshire, England. And closer to home, Wilson’s own the family pet, a Border Collie named Moon, has been the ‘guinea pig’ in providing a conveniently co-operative test animal.

The importance of Wilson’s device is highlighted by the insights gained on the Oxfordshire badgers, which are of interest to those studying the evolution of social behaviour. Professor David Macdonald, of Oxford University’s Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, has been observing these badgers since the 1970s, making them amongst the world’s most intensively studied carnivores, but Macdonald has always had difficulty tracking their detailed movements at night and observing their behaviour underground.

“Key to the issue,” he says, “is the detail of where the badgers forage and where they scent mark, and Rory Wilson’s amazing invention reveals both. This information will not only help us understand the evolution of the badgers’ mysterious social life, but will also be relevant to public health officials who need to understand their role in the transmission of bovine tuberculosis in cattle. The data we will gather in collaboration with Rory Wilson will therefore be not only interesting, but also practically useful.”



Brad Norman displaying a whale shark tag.

Wilson hopes his device will unlock many of the secrets of animal behaviour. Not only will it help save animals facing extinction now, it will also provide valuable data on many species almost certain to be

threatened in the future. The beneficiaries of his project are, he says, “the unthinkable number of animals that need to be properly understood now, tomorrow and in 20 years’ time.”

Initial trials on whale sharks at Ningaloo were staged in 2007 to see if the device could be delivered by a diver and would stay in place long enough to collect useful data about the giant fish’s still largely mysterious habits – where it feeds, breeds and goes when it is out of sight of humans in the deep oceans. They were successful, and the team now hopes to start collecting real data on whale shark behaviour in 2008, says Brad Norman.

He and Wilson met for the first time at the Rolex Awards ceremony in Singapore in October 2006 when they were individually honoured for their inspirational projects to study and protect the planet’s wildlife. Both being interested in finding ways to monitor wild animals, they hit it off immediately and vowed to work together.

Brad’s research uses a breakthrough photo analysis technique that he developed with a computer engineer and an astronomer linked to NASA, based on the unique pattern of white spots on the hide of every whale shark. A photograph of these spots acts as a visual ‘tag’ that allows scientists to recognize, record and track each individual. This innovative approach of automating the analysis of pattern data utilizing a technique for mapping star patterns also promises to open up a new world in animal studies. Brad says he has already received interest from researchers working with more than 30 other species, including manta rays, whales, dolphins, turtles, African wild dogs, lions and cheetahs.

To take his technique worldwide, Brad founded ECOCEAN, a not-for-profit conservation group that manages an extensive photo-identification database on the Internet (see www.whaleshark.org). In an innovative way to engage the global community, he is encouraging divers and tourists across the world as ‘citizen scientists’ to submit their dive photos of whale sharks to the database. Some 12,000 photographs of whale sharks from 38 countries have so far been added to the database, revealing 1150 individual whale sharks to date. At the same time the project has raised global awareness of an animal rates by the

Each new image helps compile a global map of where whale sharks live and their migratory patterns. Contributors receive notice by email of all past and further sightings of ‘their’ shark. Together, the images are helping to build a global picture of the abundance, health, range and fluctuations of the whale shark population. “Just about anyone with a disposable underwater camera can now play a part in helping to conserve whale sharks, and so help to monitor the health of the oceans,” Norman explains. “It gives people a direct stake in whale shark stewardship.”

With the Rolex Award money, Brad Norman is devoting two years full-time to his project, training local authorities, tourism operators and 20 research assistants around the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans to observe, record and protect whale sharks.

Among his great successes was helping to convince the governments of India, the Philippines and recently Taiwan to officially end the slaughter of whale sharks. The Taiwan ban comes into full force this year (2008). As a result of lobbying by Brad and others, no government in the world now actively sanctions the hunting of the giant fish – though local fishermen still prey on it.

“The whale shark is worth saving – and we can do something about it,” Brad says. “It is a big, beautiful and charismatic animal, and not dangerous. It is a perfect flagship for the health of the oceans.”

<http://www.skynews.com.au/eco/article.aspx?id=217179>





Fish die by thousands

Updated: 09:13, Wednesday February 13, 2008

Residents of Colac in Melbourne's south-west, might be closing their windows over the next fortnight, because of the smell from thousands of fish left to rot in a nearby lake.

Around 300 tonnes of dead or dying carp now line a four kilometre stretch of Lake Colac.

The fish are dying because of rising salinity levels in the lake, caused by the drought.

Salinity is now five times what it was before the drought.

Carp is an introduced species in the waterways and local authorities have been trying to eradicate them for decades, but this is not what locals were hoping.

What is worrying residents more is that there are no plans to remove the carcasses, as the council claims it is too hard to clean them up.

'It's very difficult because of the terrain that we're walking on here is very unstable under foot and makes vehicle access very difficult,' said Stewart Anderson of the Colac Otway Shire Council.

Local fishermen who use the lake to catch eels are moving as many fish as they can to the dry sand, so they can decompose faster.

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23211353-2,00.html>

Japanese mafia 'hunt Aussie whale activist'

By Lauren Williams

February 14, 2008 05:58am

Article from: **Daily Telegraph**

JAPANESE "Yakuza" gangsters have launched a campaign of intimidation to force a media blackout on the furore surrounding the country's killing of dolphins and whales, it was claimed yesterday.

Australian surfer Dave Rastovich attracted world headlines after he and conservationists including actress Isabel Lucas travelled to the Japanese fishing village of Taiji last year to protest at its annual dolphin kill.

Rastovich, the global face of surfwear giant Billabong Australia's environmental campaigns, said the multi-billion dollar Japanese surf industry had been experiencing the "heat" for his anti-whaling activities.

He said he had been told of intimidation from Yakuza thugs - the feared Japanese mafia - who had been visiting Japanese surf shops in search of the outspoken activist.

"These are the goons from the fishing industry who are visiting surf stores intimidating people and threatening to punish them financially," Rastovich said.

"People are feeling it. They are washing their hands of us. They don't feel safe".

Rastovich, from northern NSW, is a professional "free surfer" - paid six figures for photos and video shoots rather than competitions - essentially to "live the life". He enjoys a celebrity following in Japan.

Surfwear companies - keen to distance themselves from the controversy - have threatened to cancel advertising contracts with Japanese surf magazines that promote Rastovich's anti-whaling stance, sources in the industry have claimed.

Rastovich and former *Home and Away* star Lucas' daring swim into a "dolphin killing cove" in Taiji which was stained red with the marine mammals' blood resulted in warrants being issued for their arrest.

The pair plan to stage another protest at the killing cove in October but both say they have been warned of likely instant arrest.

Rastovich was recently named the face of Billabong's "Be The Change You Want In The World" environmental campaign and the firm, citing unconditional support for the surfer, deny the claim of threats to pull advertising.

But a spokesman admitted: "There are regional sensitivities we have to respect and, as such, we would not force a position on anyone in Japan. What we are prepared to do is support Rasta to highlight the issue which, in turn, fuels informed debate."

<http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=379800>



Surf star attacks Japanese thugs

Thursday Feb 14 15:00 AEDT

By Shaun Davies

ninemsn

A well-known Australian surfer says Japanese fishing industry "thugs" heaved surf store employees as they attempted to track down dolphin conservationists.

Dave Rastovich has featured heavily in ad campaigns for surf company Billabong and joined activists in October last year to protest against an annual dolphin slaughter at the Japanese whaling town of Taiji.

But he said he had been misrepresented in newspaper reports that claimed Japan's feared Yakuza gangsters were behind the alleged strong-arm tactics.

"After we left Taiji in October, fisheries reps of some sort visited surf stores along the coastline of Japan looking for us and wanting to identify anyone who may have helped us," Mr Rastovich said.

"Also, people who have helped us are now subject to exclusion and blackballing from the surfing industry.

"And not one mainstream article has been run on our action in October ... the surfing media has also run nothing on our story, despite me being on the cover of five surfing magazines within Japan in the last 12 months."

Mr Rastovich and others, including actresses Isabel Lucas and Hayden Panettiere, clashed with local fishermen during the dolphin protest before driving to Osaka and fleeing the country to avoid arrest.

But he said a story in a Sydney newspaper that claimed vicious Yakuza thugs had launched a campaign of intimidation against shop owners and the media had twisted his words.

"I do not like the Yakuza spin the Daily Telegraph put on my statements — I never said they were Yakuza," Mr Rastovich said.

Yakuza is the name given to organised crime groups in Japan, which are distinctive from the Italian mafia in that they are highly visible and tolerated to some degree by authorities.

These groups make much of their money from involvement in protection rackets, prostitution and pornography, and often have clearly marked offices in big cities.

According to information shown to ninemsn, the Japanese fishing industry may have some links to organised crime.

But any alleged standover men were unlikely to have been suit-wearing gangster types typically portrayed in films.

More likely, they would be tough operators from the fishing industry. These could possibly be regarded as a type of Yakuza, but only in the broader sense of the term, the information said.

More information on the point of view of the dolphin protesters can be found at [this website](#).

