

MEDIA RELEASE

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Western Australian Rock Lobster Fishery Maintains "Sustainable Seafood" Certification

In-depth independent audit evaluates fishery stock



Photo: Western Australia Rock Lobster

January 13, 2010 - Emeryville, CA – When annual surveillance audits showed very low settlement of Western Australian rock lobster larvae and questions were raised about the status of the breeding stock, third-party certification body Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) gathered a team of world-class experts to conduct an unprecedented special audit. The audit evaluated the fishery's compliance with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard, including a complete reassessment ("re-scoring") of MSC Principle 1, which addresses the status of the fishery stock.

After careful review, the SCS team found that the fishery, which was the first fishery certified to the MSC standard in 2000, continues to meet the MSC standard. Products from the fishery remain endorsed by the MSC and will continue to carry the MSC "Sustainable Seafood" label.

However, a substantial reduction in permitted catch has been imposed by the Minister of Fisheries in Western Australia. The most recent information shows breeding stock levels at or above target levels, but there is considerable uncertainty about these estimates.

One of the most important conditions required to maintain certification and specifically designed to reduce the uncertainties about the stock assessment estimates, is a prompt and thorough international review of the quantitative stock assessment, including the time series of breeding stock indices and key assumptions used in the assessment. Improvements in the stock assessment arising from this review will be adopted for the 2010 evaluation and will feed into management measures for the 2010-11 season.

A new harvest strategy will be publicly released and formally adopted in the near future by the Western Australia Minister of Fisheries.

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To make its determination, SCS assembled a team of world-class experts in the areas of stock assessment and modeling, ecologically sustainable fishing, and lobster fisheries and biology. The same team members, Drs. Chet Chaffee, Tony Smith, Trevor Ward and Bruce Phillips, were also chosen for the original assessment in 1999-2000 and the full re-assessment in 2005-06. Because of the sensitive nature of the audit, SCS auditors were shadowed by members of the Marine Stewardship Council and Accreditation Services International (ASI), the accreditation body which accredits SCS to perform MSC audits. ASI approved the methods and procedures SCS used to conduct the special audit.

The special audit also considered the environmental impacts (MSC Principle 2) and management system (MSC Principle 3) aspects of the fishery. The fishery was found to be in compliance with the MSC standard in these areas. While some issues require more detailed attention in the future if the fishery is to continue to remain in conformance with the MSC standard, these matters are less important than the stock issues. The complete report can be found at: <http://www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified/south-atlantic-indian-ocean/western-australia-rock-lobster/reassessment-downloads-1>

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Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), an independent certifier of environmental, food quality and food purity claims, was the first certification body to attain Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation. For more than twenty-five years, SCS has developed internationally recognized standards and certification programs aimed at spurring the highest level of environmental and quality performance. Its programs span a wide cross-section of the economy in agricultural production, food processing and handling, forestry, fisheries, energy, green building, consumer and business product manufacturing and retail. SCS has evaluated hundreds of fisheries and certified more than 2 million metric tons of fish.

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