

# LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## Question on Notice

Tuesday, 17 February 2015

2544. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Fisheries.

I refer to the critically endangered green sawfish, *Pristis zijsron*, and the endangered knifetooth sawfish, *Anoxypristis cuspidata*, as described by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and I ask:

- (a) what is the estimated annual catch of green sawfish and knifetooth sawfish in each of the Kimberley gillnet and barramundi fisheries and the Kimberley prawn trawl area;
- (b) what is the estimated current population of the knifetooth sawfish and green sawfish in Western Australian waters;
- (c) what is the estimated current population of knifetooth and green sawfish in Kimberley waters;
- (d) how do these compare with pre-fishing populations of these species, year by year;
- (e) what does the Minister consider to be a sustainable annual level of mortality, in the combined Kimberley fisheries and prawn trawl areas, for both sawfish species; and
- (f) when was the last targeted observer program conducted that was aimed at verifying by-catch numbers for these endangered and critically endangered species:
  - (i) what were the dates and times over which the observer programs were carried out, where were they located and by whom; and
  - (ii) what percentage of the fishery was subject to observer programs this year and in previous years?

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### ANSWER

- (a) Annual reported sawfish interactions in the Kimberley Gillnet and Barramundi Managed Fishery (KGBF) in recent years (ie between 2008 and 2014) have ranged from one to two annually for narrow (knifetooth) sawfish and from two to 14 with green sawfish. Four and 36 interactions with unspecified sawfish were also reported in 2010 and 2009, respectively. It is likely these interactions also included, but may not have been limited to, green and narrow sawfish (see Legislative Council Question on Notice 2542 answer to part (b) for detailed data).

With regard to the Kimberley prawn trawl area, no interactions have been reported in recent years (ie between 2008 and 2014) in the Broome Prawn Managed Fishery (BPF). For the same period, the number of reported interactions with unspecified sawfish in the Kimberley Prawn Managed Fishery (KPF) has ranged from one to four per year in the period 2010 to 2013, with no interactions reported in other years (see Legislative Council Question on Notice 2542 answer to part (e) for detailed data).

Note that in all cases data for 2014 are not yet validated and may be incomplete.

Questions on any protected and endangered species interactions in the Commonwealth's Northern Prawn Fishery (in Western Australian waters from 126 degrees 58 minutes east


[near Cape Londonderry] to the Northern Territory border) should be directed to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

(b) – (e) Not known

(f) Research was conducted in the KGBF (and with gillnet operators on Eighty Mile Beach immediately south of the KGBF) between 2003 and 2004<sup>1</sup> as part of a research program on sandbar and dusky sharks, which collected verified information about catches of all species from these fishing activities.

There have been no targeted observer programs in the KPF or BPF specifically to verify catches of sawfish species.

- (i) Catch composition data from the KGBF and Eighty Mile Beach fisheries arising from the research program referred to in (f) were collected by WA Department of Fisheries Shark Research Section staff between the 19 January 2003 and 9 June 2004. Data were collected from five vessels at four locations, being the northern and southern ends of Eighty Mile Beach, Roebuck Bay and Admiralty Gulf.
- (ii) In total, 160 days of gillnet fishing were monitored in 2003 and 2004 during the research program referred to in (f), which equates to between 6 and 32% of fishing effort levels in the KGBF between 2008 and 2014<sup>2</sup>.



MINISTER FOR FISHERIES

<sup>1</sup> McAuley, R.; Lenanton, R.; Chidiow, J.; Allison, R.; Heist, E. (2005). Biology and stock assessment of the thickskin (sandbar) shark, *Carcharhinus plumbeus*, in Western Australia and further refinement of the dusky shark, *Carcharhinus obscurus*, stock assessment. Final FRDC report, project no. 2000/134; Fisheries Research Report No. 151, Department of Fisheries, WA. 132 pp. [http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/research\\_reports/frr151.pdf](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/research_reports/frr151.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Newman, S.J., Mitsopoulos, G., Skepper, C., Thomson, A., Marriott, R. and Wallis, D. 2014. North Coast Nearshore and Estuarine Fishery Status Report pp. 185-191In: Status Reports of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Western Australia 2013/14: The State of the Fisheries eds. W.J. Fletcher and K. Santoro, Department of Fisheries, Western Australia, pp. 185-191