



MINISTER FOR FISHERIES

MEDIA STATEMENT

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

13/10/06

Sea lion pups to receive protection from rock lobster pots.

Fisheries Minister Jon Ford today announced new measures to protect vulnerable sea lion pups off Western Australia's coast from becoming accidentally trapped in commercial and recreational rock lobster pots.

Mr Ford said from the start of the 2006-07 rock lobster season, Sea Lion Exclusion Devices (SLEDs) would become mandatory for all pots used between Freshwater Point (near Dongara) and Wedge Island (north Lancelin), in waters less than 20m deep.

"Sea lion pups have been observed foraging in lobster pots in shallow waters, attempting to eat trapped lobsters and the device is simply a bolt that stops the pups from entering the neck of rock lobster pots, becoming trapped and possibly drowning," the Minister said.

"The Australian sea lion is listed as 'vulnerable' under the Commonwealth's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and 'specially protected' under the State Wildlife Conservation Act.

"Our rock lobster industry and the WA Government have worked hard to develop a simple and cost-effective way of protecting these mammals.

"The use of SLEDs was recommended by the Rock Lobster Industry Advisory Committee."

Mr Ford said specifications for the device were developed through an extensive testing program undertaken by the Department of Fisheries and commercial fishermen, and research had confirmed the device had successfully kept sea lion pups out of rock lobster pots, but did not impact on rock lobster catches.

"By installing the SLEDs, both commercial and recreational fishers are playing a vital role in helping to conserve this important marine species and ensuring our State's rock lobster fishery maintains its highly regarded environmental credentials," he said.

The Minister said compliance with the new rules had been made easier with the development of a simple gauge, which would allow fishers and Fisheries and Marine Officers to check, quickly and easily, that gear complied with the new requirements.

"To assist recreational fishers, the Department of Fisheries has facilitated the manufacture of SLEDs that can easily be fitted to recreational pots," he said.

“Both the recreational devices and the gauges are now readily available.”

More information is available from the department’s website:

<http://www.fish.wa.gov.au> and a brochure on the SLEDs can be obtained from Department of Fisheries offices.

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