



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

Q's & A's

15 December 2003

TOPIC: Recreational prawn fishing closures, 2003/2004

Q1. What areas are being closed?

A1. The recreational prawn fishery was closed Nov. 17 in Saanich Inlet near Victoria, Management Area 19-7 to 19-12 and Alberni Inlet, Areas 23-1 to 23-3. Additional closures are announced to take effect Dec. 29 as follows:

- Close Hoskyn Channel east of Quadra Island, Subarea 13-12. Reduce fishing to 3 day weekends in Subareas 13-13, 13-14, 13-15 and 13-16.
- Close Powell River to Cortes Island, Subareas 15-2 and 15-3. Subarea 15-1 will remain open at this time, unless there is a significant increase in the amount of gear in this area as a result of adjacent area closures.
- Close Agamemnon Channel and lower Malaspina Strait Subareas 16-10, 16-17 and 16-18.
- Close Porpoise Bay in Sechelt Inlet, Subarea 16-5.
- Close Nanaimo, Gabriola Island to Ballenas Island, Subareas 17-10, 17-12 and 17-18. Note, 17-18 is included per advice from C&P re enforceability.
- Close Stuart Channel and Ladysmith Harbour, Subareas 17-5, 17-6, 17-7 and 17-9. Note, Ladysmith Harbour is included for management purposes.
- Note that Howe Sound, the remainder of Salmon and Sechelt Inlets and the central Gulf showed an abundance of female prawns, not requiring closure.

Q2. Can I continue to fish other species of shrimp?

A2. No, all recreational shrimp fishing including prawns is closed in the affected areas.

Q3. Where can I get a map of the Areas being closed?

A3. Public notices with maps have been distributed to many recreational fishing supply outlets and marinas. Maps are available at all local DFO offices and from fishery managers. Maps of Areas and Subareas are available on the internet, at:

http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ops/fm/Areas/areamap_e.htm
http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ops/fm/Areas/areamap_f.htm

Q4. When will the areas close?

A4. All gear must be removed from the water prior to Monday Dec. 29, 2003.

- Q5. What if there's a storm and I can't get my gear out of the water?
- A5. Call your local Fishery Office and make arrangements to remove your gear as soon as possible. If you are removing gear after the close date, you will be required to release all of the catch.
- Q6. How long will the areas be closed?
- A6. Fishing gear can be put back in the water April 1, 2004.
- Q7. Why are the areas being closed?
- A7. Scientific sampling in these areas has established that there are low numbers of female prawns carrying eggs. The closure will allow the prawns to complete their spawning cycle.
- Q8. Why are you closing – I'm still catching large prawns without eggs.
- A8. At this time of year the prawn population includes both adult female prawns carrying eggs, and prawns that are only slightly smaller in size. Those prawns not carrying eggs are a year younger and are in a "transitional stage" when they all change from their male life stage to their female life stage. There can be an abundance of the transition prawns, but the closure is still necessary to protect the far fewer adult females that are now completing their life cycle.
- Q9. Is this a conservation concern?
- A9. No. There is an abundance of younger prawns. Closures ensure sustainability of future fisheries by allowing the incubation period to be completed without handling and release mortality on remaining female stocks.
- Q10. How can the recreational fishery recommence in April if this is a sustainability concern?
- A10. Adult females will finish the egg incubation period and the larvae will hatch out of the eggs by April. The adult female prawns die several weeks later. Fishing in April will not affect the female stocks that we are protecting at this time. This fall's sampling has shown that there is an abundance of younger male and transitional prawns that will be available in abundance when recreational fishing recommences.
- Q11. When is the commercial fishery?
- A11. The commercial prawn fishery is scheduled to commence May 1, annually.
- Q12. Will the commercial fishery affect conservation?

- A12. No. Upcoming prawn stocks are abundant. The commercial fishery has 11 observers trained in spawner index sampling that sample throughout the commercial fishery, throughout the coast, to ensure that areas are not overfished.
- Q13. What is the spawner index?
- A13. The spawner index is a measure of the average number of female prawns caught in a standard size trap in a 24 hour period.
- Q14. How big is the recreational fishery?
- A14. The recreational fishery has increased in recent years due to reduced fishing opportunities for salmon and groundfish. Recreational fishing is growing quickly. There is no estimate of the numbers of recreational prawn fishers. However in some areas, 100's of traps are set, throughout the year.
- Q15. How big is the commercial prawn fishery?
- A15. The most recent year of records for comparison purposes is 2002. That year, prawns were the 8th most valuable commercial fishery on the B.C. coast, and the 3rd most valuable invertebrate fishery after geoducks and crabs. It had a landed value in excess of \$17 M. Usually the fishery is worth in excess of \$30 M.
- Q16. What happens to gear pulled out of the water by Fishery Officers?
- A16. The prawns in the traps are released. The gear is taken back to the local fishery office where it may be picked up. If the identification on the buoy includes a telephone number, then the owner is contacted.
- Q17. Do prawns survive if they are released?
- A17. Prawns don't have a swim bladder, so they can survive if they are hauled to the surface and released. However, there will always be some mortality due to handling, predators, and surface water conditions. Release prawns carrying eggs as quickly as possible at the site where they were caught, to improve survival.
- Q18. Where can I get additional information about prawns?
- A18. Additional general prawn information is available on the Fisheries and Oceans web site at: <http://www-ops2.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/xnet/content/shellfish/prawn/default.htm>
- Q19. Who did the sampling?
- A19. Commercial vessels did the sampling under scientific licence issued by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.
- Q20. Was there a DFO monitor on board?

- A20. There was a DFO trained prawn observer on board for every haul day. Due to the annual training and experience, we have confidence in their ability to sample.
- Q21. Was the sampling conducted in the same manner/area/time frame as past years?
- A21. The sampling was conducted in the same manner as past years. Specific set locations may have varied, but then so do prawn stock locations from year to year. Sample timing this year was earlier than last year.
- Q22. Does this mean that the commercial fishery overfished?
- A22. The 2003 fishery was managed more aggressively and conservatively to protect stocks, than any previous commercial prawn fishery. In-season escapement targets were met. Female prawn abundance declined in the late summer and early fall in some areas, faster than anticipated. Some areas which were tested, did not require closure.
- Q23. Why do stocks decline after the commercial fishery closes?
- A23. Natural mortality will reduce the abundance of adult females. In the past we have estimated this to be about 10% per month. Recreational harvesting will also have an effect in reducing abundance. In some areas, natural mortality plus recreational harvesting may increase overall mortality rates by more than 20%.
- Q24. Why are the First Nation's FSC fisheries allowed to continue?
- A24. FSC fisheries are closed when needed for conservation purposes. These closures are at levels which are considered to be important for sustainability of the fisheries, which is above the levels at which managers have identified for conservation. Department fishery managers don't wait until conservation concerns are realized before recommending action. Nonetheless, all coastal First Nations have been advised of the closures or reduced fishing areas, and have been requested to relocate FSC fisheries outside of affected areas, or to release prawns carrying eggs.

PREPARED BY: JIM MORRISON

(250) 756-7233, FAX 756-7162, morrisonj@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca