

Cuttlefish Update

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Point Lowly, in the northern Spencer Gulf is the only known site in the world where Giant Australian Cuttlefish (*Sepia apama*) form dense spawning aggregations. Research to date has shown a significant decline in Giant Cuttlefish populations at the Point Lowly aggregation site, although the cause of the decline remains unclear.

In May 2012, the State Government took steps to provide further protection to Giant Cuttlefish by adding an extension to the existing Point Lowly cephalopod fishing closure area. While research to date indicates that commercial and recreational fishing activity is not considered to pose a threat to Giant Cuttlefish populations, this precautionary measure was taken to afford a maximum level of protection for Giant Cuttlefish breeding aggregations.

Recognising that the issues facing Cuttlefish populations in northern Spencer Gulf are complex, in July 2012 the Cuttlefish working group was formed to investigate and address the issues associated with the population, and to provide advice to the Government regarding the ongoing protection and sustainability of this iconic population.

In March 2013, the State Government announced an additional \$150 000 for new research into changes in Giant Cuttlefish populations. Funding has been committed to ongoing monitoring of the Point Lowly aggregation area this year. The working group is also considering additional research priorities that can be implemented for the 2013 breeding season, which is expected to commence from May.

Scott Ashby
Cuttlefish Working Group Chair
Chief Executive, Primary Industries and Regions SA

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Cuttlefish working group

The Cuttlefish working group's role is to consider relevant available information, identify gaps in knowledge and consider management actions. It also focuses on a whole of Government approach to engaging community groups and other key stakeholders in Cuttlefish management and monitoring issues.

Current membership of the working group comprises representatives from:

- Primary Industries and Regions South Australia (PIRSA)
- South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI)
- Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR)
- Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
- Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI)
- South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC)
- Department for Manufacturing, Innovation, Trade, Resources and Energy (DMITRE)
- Whyalla City Council
- Conservation Council of South Australia
- University of Adelaide

Management

On 28 March 2013, the State Government introduced a temporary closure to fishing for cuttlefish in northern Spencer Gulf.

The closure is a precautionary measure that aims to ensure a maximum level of protection for Cuttlefish populations in northern Spencer Gulf, while continuing and new research investigates the cause for the decline in Giant Cuttlefish populations at the Point Lowly aggregation site.

The temporary closure is in addition to the existing cephalopod fishing closure the State Government put in place around Point Lowly in 1998, as well as the extension to this area introduced in 2012. The Cuttlefish closure applies to all waters of Spencer Gulf north of the line commencing near Arno Bay on the Eyre Peninsula to the Wallaroo Jetty. [View map](#)

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Research

During the 2012 breeding season, a research project was undertaken by SARDI to develop a standard methodology for on-going integrated monitoring and assessment of the Giant Cuttlefish population abundance, habitat condition and water quality at the iconic Point Lowly aggregation site.

It was hoped that the research undertaken by SARDI would provide a reason for the decline in Giant Cuttlefish numbers at Point Lowly but this research was inconclusive.

A copy of SARDI's research findings was release in March and can be found on the [SARDI website](#)

Ongoing monitoring of the Point Lowly area will continue to be undertaken by SARDI for the 2013 breeding season.

Researchers have been successful in securing additional funding for a new research project which will help to determine the movement patterns and population structure of the Giant Cuttlefish in the Upper Spencer Gulf, as well as evaluate any environmental and human impacts that could be causing the species decline. The information provided by the research will be critical to informing future management measures by helping to reduce the risk of factors contributing to the change in abundance and distribution of the species.

Funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), the project will be led by the University of Adelaide and SARDI, in partnership with the SA Museum, PIRSA and DEWNR.

Community participation will be an important part of this new project, with further information to be released in coming weeks.

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