TASMANIAN OCTOPUS FISHERY ASSESSMENT 2012/13

Jessica André and Klaas Hartmann

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This assessment of the Tasmanian octopus fishery is produced by the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS).

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Executive Summary

STOCK STATUS	TRANSITIONAL-DEPLETING
Given trends in catch and the ongoing declining trend in CPUE over the last eight years, the *Octopus pallidus* stock is considered transitional depleting.	
STOCK	Tasmanian Octopus Fishery
INDICATORS	Catch, effort and CPUE trends

The Tasmanian Octopus Fishery is a multi-species fishery in the Bass Strait primarily targeting *Octopus pallidus* and the less abundant *Octopus tetricus* (Table 1). The Scalefish Fishery Management Plan (revised in 2009) provides the management framework for the fishery. The (commercial) fishery is effectively a sole operator fishery with the same operator since its commencement in 1980. This arrangement is effective in ensuring profitability in the fishery and stewardship of the resource.

In this assessment, the octopus fishery is described in terms of catch, effort and catch rates at the State level. A more detailed analysis of catch, effort and catch rates at the fishing block level is also presented. The commercial catch history for the period 2000/01 to 2012/13 is assessed.

Catches have increased over the last decade and stabilised at approximately 100 tonnes since 2005/06. Effort followed a similar pattern and has stabilised at around 300,000 pot lifts since 2006/07. There is a strong seasonal pattern in CPUE, which is highest during the brooding peak for the species (autumn). CPUE has declined since the recent peak in the mid-2000s but remains at/above CPUE from the early 2000s which corresponded to a lower harvest level. The 50-pot samples, which are more representative of the stock status, also show an ongoing decline in CPUE in both weight and number, with 2012/13 reaching the lowest CPUE since the start of the 50-pot sampling. The decline of CPUE, seemingly in response to an increase in catch, suggests fishing mortality is reducing the spawner biomass and affecting recruitment.

In 2012/13, catch and effort have focused on the fishing blocks out of Stanley (especially 4E1) and around Flinders Island, specifically south-west Flinders (4G2). There has been a shift in the last year from fishing around Flinders Island towards the south-west of the island and the north-east coast of Tasmania.

Bycatch of octopus from other commercial fisheries (mainly *O. maorum* from the rock lobster fishery) has decreased over time and has been relatively low the last five years (around 8 tonnes on average). The recreational catch of octopus appears minimal at less than a tonne retained per annum. The impact of the fishery on bycatch and protected species is low due to the nature of the gear used.

Performance indicators and reference points have been proposed for defining the stock status. Given the ongoing decline in CPUE over the last eight years and the breach of several other reference points, the pale octopus stock is considered transitional depleting.

It is important that the 50-pot sampling continues at a consistent and high level so that a sufficient time series is available to assess stock status. Future assessments will develop regional reference points to monitor the appropriate spatial distribution of catch, as well as reference points for the impact on bycatch and protected species for the octopus fishery.

Table1 Main features and statistics for the Tasmanian Octopus Fishery.

Fishing methods	Unbaited octopus pots
Primary landing port	Stanley
Management methods	**Input control:** • Fishing licence (octopus) allows the use of 10,000 pots (and a maximum of 1,000 pots per line) to target *Octopus pallidus*, *O. tetricus* and *O. maorum* • Fishing zone restriction (East Bass Strait and West Bass Strait octopus zones only) **Output control*:*** • Possession limit of 100 kg of octopus per day (all species confounded) for holders of a fishing licence (personal) and a scalefish licence package, and recreational fishery.
Main market	Tasmania and mainland Australia
Fishing licences	2
Active vessels	2

1. Introduction

The fishery

The Tasmanian Octopus Fishery has been operating since 1980. Prior to December 2009 the fishery operated under permit. Historically, access to the commercial fishery was provided to holders of a fishing licence (personal), a vessel licence and a scalefish or rock lobster licence via a trip limit of 100 kg. This limit also applies to recreational fishers.

Since December 2009, a specific octopus licence was required to participate in the fishery. Two licenses were issued, belonging to the same operator.

Since 1996, under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement (OCS) with the Commonwealth of Australia, Tasmania has assumed management control of the octopus fishery out to 200 nautical miles.

The Tasmanian Octopus Fishery primarily targets the pale octopus (*Octopus pallidus*), with lesser targeted catches of the Gloomy octopus (*Octopus tetricus*) and the Maori octopus (*Octopus maorum*) also taken, primarily as byproduct. The main fishing method is unbaited moulded plastic pots (volume 3000 ml) attached to a demersal longline 3-4 km long and set on the sea floor at variable depths of 15-85 m (Leporati et al. 2009). Currently, a maximum of 1,000 pots per line is allowed. Octopuses are attracted to these pots as a refuge. Pots are hauled after about 3–6 weeks in the water to achieve optimum catch rates. An abundant food supply may support a large population of octopus and when combined with a shortage of suitable shelters results in high catch rates. Commercial octopus fishing is presently restricted to the East Bass Strait and West Bass Strait fishing zones (Figure 1.1). While no further octopus licences can be issued for the Bass Strait area, the remaining State waters are classified as developmental and could be opened to fishing providing necessary research is undertaken at the cost of the applicant. There are, however, no plans to open further areas to commercial octopus fishing at the present time.

Octopus are also targeted by recreational fishing, although catch sizes are small. A total of 100kg of octopus in any one day and at any one time is allowed under Tasmanian legislation.

From 2000 to 2005 octopus catches increased substantially, and since then have remained around 100 tonnes with some strong inter-annual variation (Figure 1.2). The majority of the catch originates from the Octopus Fishery. *O. tetricus* has only been reported in the fishery since 2010, mostly from around Flinders Island and reached around two tonnes in 2011. This increase in catch is likely due a combination of a southern expansion of the species' range (REDMAP 2013) and an increase in targeted effort for *O. tetricus*. The catch of *O. maorum* has been stable at around 1.5 tonnes since 2008 although catches are possibly underestimated in the current dataset due to potential unaccounted catch from Commonwealth trawlers.

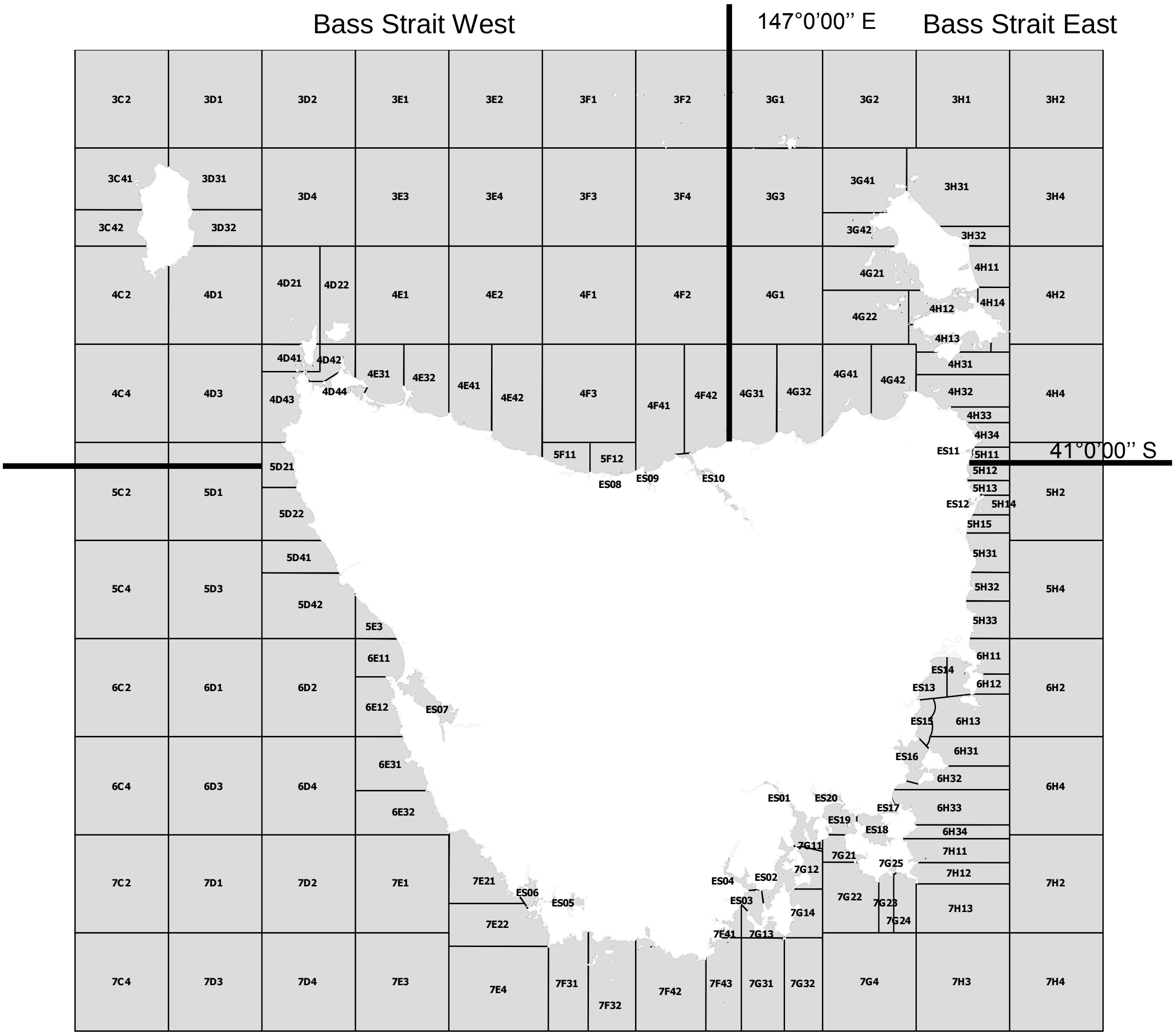


Figure 1.1 East and West Bass Strait octopus fishing zones and blocks. The octopus fishery reports in latitude and longitude but for the purpose of this report, fishing areas will be reported in fishing blocks.

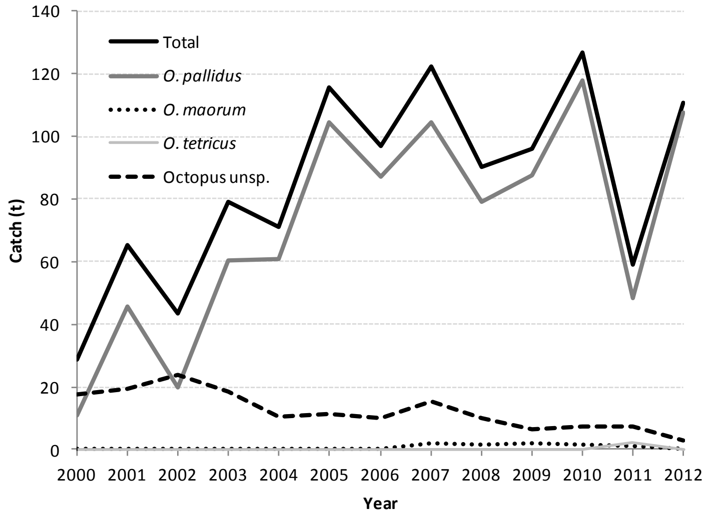


Figure 1.2 State-wide octopus catches since 2000 from all commercial sources up to 2012.

Assessment of stock status

Stock status definitions

In order to assess the fisheries in a manner consistent with the national approach (and other jurisdictions) we have adopted the national stock status categories (Flood et al. 2012). These categories define the assessed state of the stock in terms of recruitment overfishing, which is often treated as a limit reference point. Recruitment overfished stocks are not collapsed but they do have reduced productivity. Fisheries are ideally also managed towards targets that maximise benefits from the harvesting, such as economic yield or provision of food. The scheme used here does not attempt to assess the fishery against any target outcomes.

Stock status	Description	Potential implications for management of the stock
SUSTAINABLE	Stock for which biomass (or biomass proxy) is at a level sufficient to ensure that, on average, future levels of recruitment are adequate (i.e. not recruitment overfished) and for which fishing pressure is adequately controlled to avoid the stock becoming recruitment overfished	Appropriate management is in place
TRANSITIONAL-RECOVERING ↑	Recovering stock—biomass is recruitment overfished, but management measures are in place to promote stock recovery, and recovery is occurring	Appropriate management is in place, and the stock biomass is recovering
TRANSITIONAL-DEPLETING ↓	Deteriorating stock—biomass is not yet recruitment overfished, but fishing pressure is too high and moving the stock in the direction of becoming recruitment overfished	Management is needed to reduce fishing pressure and ensure that the biomass does not deplete to an overfished state
OVERFISHED	Stock is recruitment overfished, and current management is not adequate to recover the stock; or adequate management measures have been put in place but have not yet resulted in measurable improvements	Management is needed to recover this stock; if adequate management measures are already in place, more time may be required for them to take effect
UNDEFINED	Not enough information exists to determine stock status	Data required to assess stock status are needed

Proposed performance indicators and reference points

The determination of stock status is based on the consideration of the commercial catch and effort data, which are assessed by calculating fishery performance indicators and comparing them with reference points (Table 1.1).

Fishing mortality and biomass are typical performance indicators used to assess stock status in fisheries. Here, total commercial catch and CPUE (numbers per pots from the 50-pot samples) are used instead as proxies as there are insufficient data to calculate fishing mortality or biomass. These are compared to a reference period: 2000/01 to 2009/10 for catch and 2004/05 to 2009/10 for CPUE (2004/05 corresponding to the start of the 50-pot sampling).

Other measures are also taken into consideration in the determination of stock status such as changes in biological characteristics of the stock, indicators of stock stress and significant external factors related to fishing activity.

Table 1.1 Summary of the proposed performance indicators and reference point.

Performance indicators	Reference points
Fishing mortality	• Catch > highest catch value from the reference period (107.2 t) • Catch< lowest catch value from the reference period (18.5 t)
Biomass	• Numbers per pot < lowest value from the reference period (0.40 octopus/pot)
Change in biological characteristics	• Significant change in the size/age composition of commercial catches
Stress	• Significant numbers of fish landed in a diseased or clearly unhealthy condition • Occurrence of a pollution event that may produce risks to fish stocks, the health of fish habitats or to human health • Any other indication of fish stock stress

Data sources and analysis

Commercial data

Commercial catch and effort data are based on the Octopus Fishery and the Scalefish Fishing Record logbook returns. In both cases octopus catches are reported in weight. Since November 2004, a 50-pot sampling program has been conducted, where fishers are required to collect all octopus caught in 50 randomly selected pots from a single line, representing 10% of a standard commercial line. From these 50-pot samples, the total and gutted weight of the catch, numbers of males and females, and the percentage of pots with eggs are recorded. Fishers are only required to sample a single line where multiple lines were located within a 15 km radius.

Weight-at-age is highly variable in octopus due to a high individual variability and a rapid response to environmental factors (Leporati et al. 2008b, André et al. 2009). This introduces unpredictability in catch weight so that it becomes difficult to use when interpreting trends in population size. The 50-pot samples provide numbers of octopus, which is more representative of the state of the stock. Consistent, high level sampling has only been in place since 2011 and a longer time-series will be required to obtain a more accurate understanding of the stock status – particularly at a smaller spatial scale (e.g. block level).

Recreational fishery

Data on the recreational fishery catch of octopus in Tasmania is sparse. Detailed analyses of the Tasmanian recreational fishery are based on the 2000/01 National Survey (Lyle 2005) and the 2007/08 state-wide fishing survey (Lyle *et al.* 2009).

Data analysis

For the purpose of this assessment, catch, effort and catch rate analyses were restricted to commercial catches of *Octopus pallidus* for the period March 2000 to February 2013.

A fishing year from 1st March to the last day of February has been adopted for annual reporting, which reflects the licensing year. Catches have been analysed fishery-wide and by fishing blocks (Figure 1.1).

All weights were converted to whole weight based on the conversion rate:

Whole weight = 1.2132 * *Gutted weight* + 19.817

where *Whole weight* and *Gutted weight* are in grams. The relationship was estimated from 1764 individuals sampled between November 2004 and November 2006 (Leporati, unpublished data).

The number of pots pulled in a given month was used as a measure of effort in this assessment. Catch returns for which effort information was incomplete were flagged and excluded when calculating effort or catch rates. All records were however included for reporting catches.

The impact of soak time (the time during which the fishing gear is actively in the water) was determined by analysing CPUE trends (in catch number per pot) through time for the 50-pot sampling data.

Catch rates of pale octopus have been standardised using a generalised linear model (GLM) to reduce the impact of obscuring effects such as season on the underlying trends (Kimura 1981, 1988). However, while standardised catch rates are preferred over the simple geometric mean, other factors may remain unaccounted for that obscure the relationship between standardised catch rates and stock size, such as increasing fisher efficiency.

There is currently only one operator in the Tasmanian Octopus Fishery, the depth fished is relatively constant and the two vessels cooperate, with the vessel pulling the gear not necessarily being the same vessel that set it. Consequently depth, vessel and skipper were not included in the generalised linear model, the factors considered were month and block. The generalised linear model was applied to weight per pot for the whole commercial dataset and number per pot for the 50-pot sampling dataset (Table 1.2). This process removes the effect of season and location so that trends in CPUE are more accurately reflective of change in octopus density.

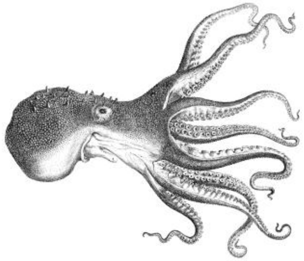
Table 1.2 Generalised linear model (GLM) for the catch rates of pale octopus across the whole of Tasmania. CPUE was expressed in weight per pot for the whole dataset, and in number per pot for the 50-pot sampling. The adjusted R^2 has been used for the Variation described.

Data	**Model**	**Variation described**
Whole dataset	Ln cpue = Constant + year + month + block	33%
50-pot sampling (number)	Ln cpue = Constant + year + month + block	17%

Species biological summaries

All three octopus species are short lived and fast growing. Table 1.3 summarises the biology of each species.

Table 1.3 Life history and biology of *O. pallidus, O. tetricus* and *O. maorum*. In the Source column, [1] refers to *Octopus pallidus,* [2] to *Octopus tetricus and* [3] to *Octopus maorum.*

Species	**Pale octopus** *Octopus pallidus*	**Gloomy octopus** *Octopus tetricus*	**Maori octopus** *Octopus maorum*	**Source**
Illustration	 (William Hoyle)	 (Angustus Gould)	 (Peter Gouldthorpe)	
Habitat	Sand and mud habitats to depth of 600m.	Rocky reefs and sand habitats in shallow waters, up to 30 m depth.	Rocky reefs, beds of seagrass or seaweeds, sand down to 549 m.	Norman (2000)[1,2,3] Edgar (2008)[1,2,3]
Distribution	South-east Australia, including Tasmania.	Subtropical eastern Australia and northern New Zealand, increasingly found in Tasmania.	Temperate and sub-Antarctic waters of New Zealand and southern Australia.	Norman (2000)[1,2] Stranks (1996)[3]
Diet	Crustaceans and shellfish (bivalves).	Crustaceans (crabs, lobster) and shellfish (gastropods, bivalves).	Crustaceans (crabs, lobsters), fish, shellfish (abalone, mussels) and other octopuses.	Norman and Reid (2000)[1,2] Norman (2000)[1,2,3]
Movement and stock structure	Limited movement and dispersal from natal habitat. Eastern and western Bass Strait populations likely to be two discrete sub-populations.	Undefined.	• Several genetically distinct populations. • At least 2 populations in Tasmania: North-east Tasmanian population and South-west Tasmanian populations (which extends to South Australia). • Adults of the species aggregate all year-round in Eaglehawk Bay in the Tasman Peninsula).	Doubleday *et al*. (2008)[1] Doubleday *et al*. (2009)[3]
Natural mortality	High. Undefined.	Undefined.	Undefined.	
Maximum age	Up to 18 months.	Undefined.	Maximum of 7.3 months from ageing study but lifespan potentially up to 3 years.	Leporati *et al*. (2008b)[1] Doubleday *et al*. (2011)[3] Grubert and Wadley (2000)[3]

Growth	• Highly variable, partly dependant on water temperature and hatching season. • Max weight: 1.2 kg • Growth is initially rapid in the post-hatching phase, before slowing down. Growth has been represented by a 2-phase growth model with an initial exponential growth phase followed by a slower (generally power) growth phase. Average growth in the first 114 days was estimated at $W = 0.246e^{0.014t}$ in spring/summer and $W = 0.276e^{0.018t}$ in summer/autumn, where *W* is the weight in g and *t* is the age in days.	• Max weight: up to 2.6 kg • Growth between 49 g to 2.64 kg described by the growth equation: $W = 3.385(1 - e^{-0.07642t})^3$ where *W* is the weight in kg and *t* is the age in days. Growth in the field might however only be about 40% of growth in aquarium.	• Max weight: 15 kg • Growth equation undefined	Leporati *et al*. (2008a)[1] André *et al*. (2008)[1] Joll (1977, 1983)[2] Stranks (1996)[3]
Maturity	Size at 50% maturity for females reached at 473g. Males appear to mature earlier (<250 g).	• Size-at-50% maturity undefined. • Males are mature between 100-150g. Females commence sexual activity at about 500 g and generally spawn between 1-2 kg.	• Size-at-50% maturity undefined. • Female mature between 0.6 to 1 kg. • Weight-specific fecundity range from 6.82 to 27.70 eggs/gram body. • Mating activity is independent of female maturity.	Leporati *et al*. (2008a)[1] Joll (1983)[2] Grubert and Wadley (2000)[3]
Spawning	• Semelparous (i.e. reproduces only once before dying). • Spawns all year round with peaks in late summer/early autumn • Around 450-800 eggs per spawning event. • Egg length: 11-13 mm.	• Semelparous (i.e. reproduces only once before dying). • Spawning season undefined. • Between 125 000 and 700 000 eggs depending on size • Egg length: 2.4 mm.	• Semelparous (i.e. reproduces only once before dying). • Spawning season: spring-summer in New Zealand but appear to mate and lay all year round in Tasmania. • Lay around 7,000 eggs in captivity but up to 196 000 eggs in ovaries of wild caught animals. Egg length: 6.5-7.5 mm.	Leporati *et al*. (2008a)[1] Joll (1983)[2] Anderson (1999)[3] Grubert and Wadley (2000)[3]
Earlylife history	Large benthic hatchlings (0.25g) settling directly in the benthos.	Planktonic hatchlings (2-5mm length) settling at 0.3g (8 mm).	Planktonic hatchlings (5 mm length).	Leporati *et al*. (2007)[1] Joll (1983)[2] Anderson (1999)[3]
Recruitment	Variable.	Variable. No stock-recruitment relationship defined.	Variable. No stock-recruitment relationship defined.	

2. State catch, effort and catch rates

Commercial catch from octopus pots

Influence of soak time

The 50-pot samples indicated that soak time did not appear to affect CPUE by number or weight (*Catch weight per unit effort* = -0.001**Soak time* + 2.89, *p*>1) (Figure 2.1). This indicated that fishers were choosing a soak time sufficient to obtain maximum catch rates and that the soak time could be disregarded when calculating catch rates. Consequently the number of shots was used as the measure of effort when calculating catch rates.

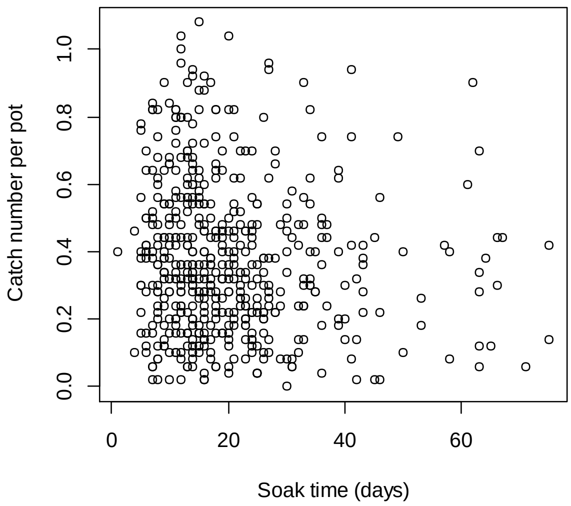


Figure 2.1 CPUE (in catch number per pot) relative to soak time of octopus pots.

Catch and effort

Catch of *O. pallidus* has increased since 2000/01 but has remained consistent over the last seven years at around 100 tonnes (Figure 2.2). Catch for the 2012/13 licensing year was the highest ever recorded for this fishery, reaching 125 tonnes. Current catch levels were about double of what they were prior to 2000 (Leporati et al. 2009). Effort has also increased from 2002/03 and had stabilised since 2005/06 at around 300,000 pots (Figure 2.3), which is on average the same level as pre-2000 (Leporati et al. 2009). However, in the last licensing year effort was the highest recorded since 2000/01 at 440,000 pots set.

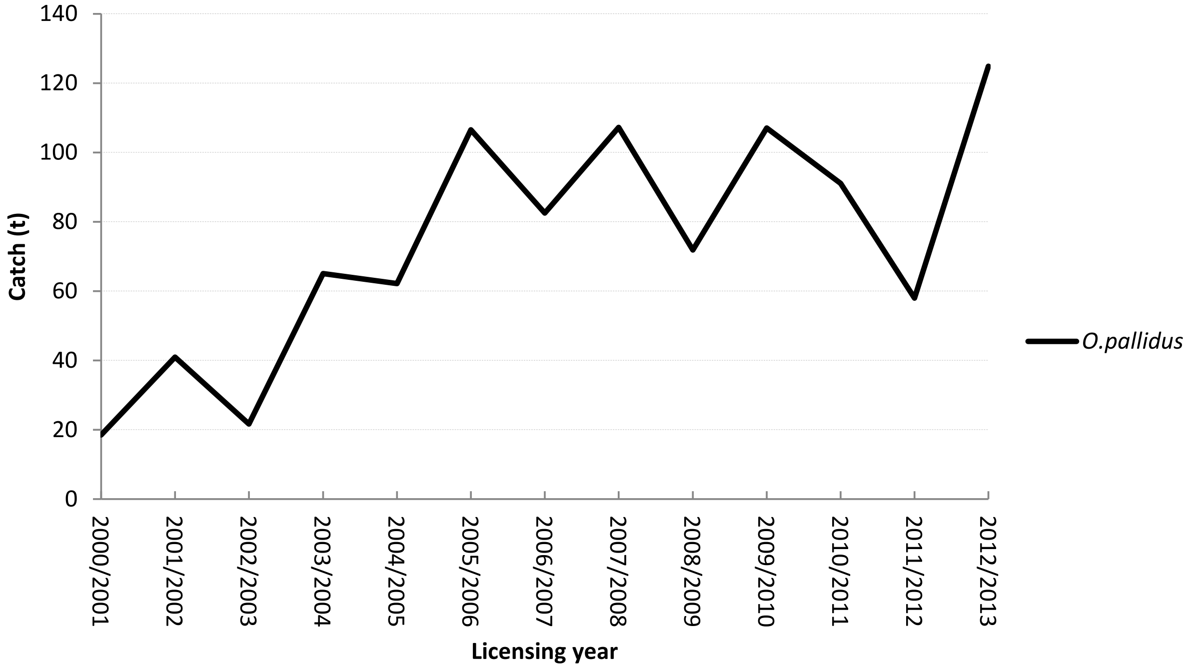


Figure 2.2 Total catches State-wide (tonnes) for *Octopus pallidus* since 2000/01.

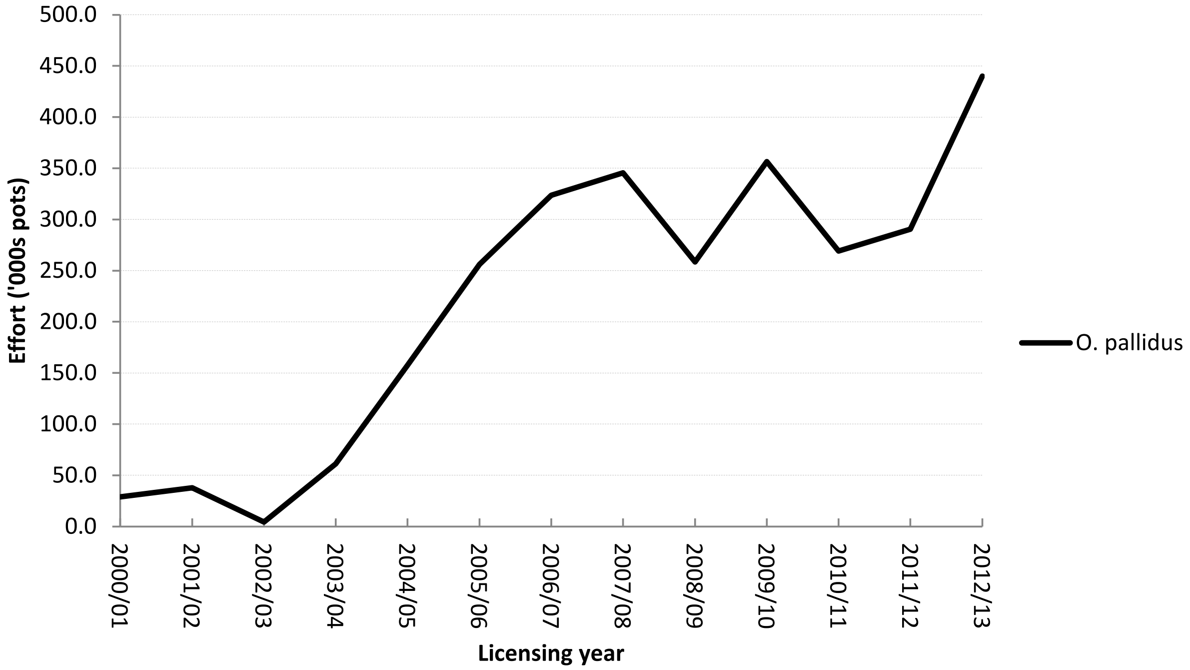


Figure 2.3 State-wide effort (thousands pots) for *Octopus pallidus* since 2000/01.

CPUE

CPUE based on the 50-pot sampling followed a similar pattern to the CPUE for the total commercial catch (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). CPUE appeared to be seasonal with higher catch rates in autumn/early winter (March to July, Figure 2.4), which is in accordance with previous CPUE analyses (Leporati et al. 2009). This peak in CPUE corresponds to the brooding peak for the species, which occurs in autumn (Leporati et al. 2008a). Female octopus use the pots as shelters to deposit their eggs and the impact on recruitment of removing brooding females has been questioned previously, especially since *O. pallidus* is an holobenthic species (i.e. produce egg batches in the hundreds and benthic hatchlings) with limited juvenile dispersal.

The licensing year 2004/05 was chosen as a reference year for CPUE as the 50-pot sampling started in that year (Figure 2.5). The catch rate standardisation removed the seasonal effect (which was evident in Figure 2.4). CPUE has declined since the recent peak in the mid-2000s but remained at/above CPUE from the early 2000s, which corresponded to a lower harvest. Thus the decline may be due to natural variability in the stock, however, 50-pot sampling was not conducted at this time and this earlier CPUE may be misleading. It is, however, worth noting that CPUE information alone is an unreliable indicator of the stock status for holobenthic species of octopus (Leporati et al. 2009). The underlying composition and recruitment potential of the population may be substantially impacted by fishing before CPUE is affected (Leporati et al. 2009).

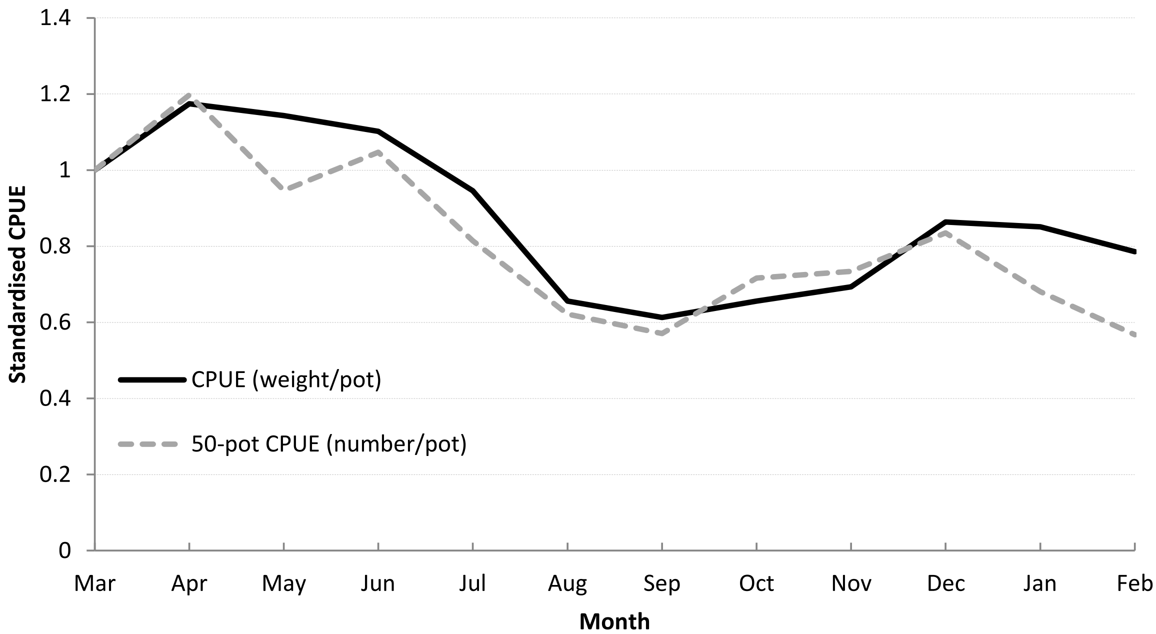


Figure 2.4 *Octopus pallidus* standardised catch per unit effort (CPUE) relative to March levels in weight per pot (total commercial) and in number per pot (50-pot sampling).

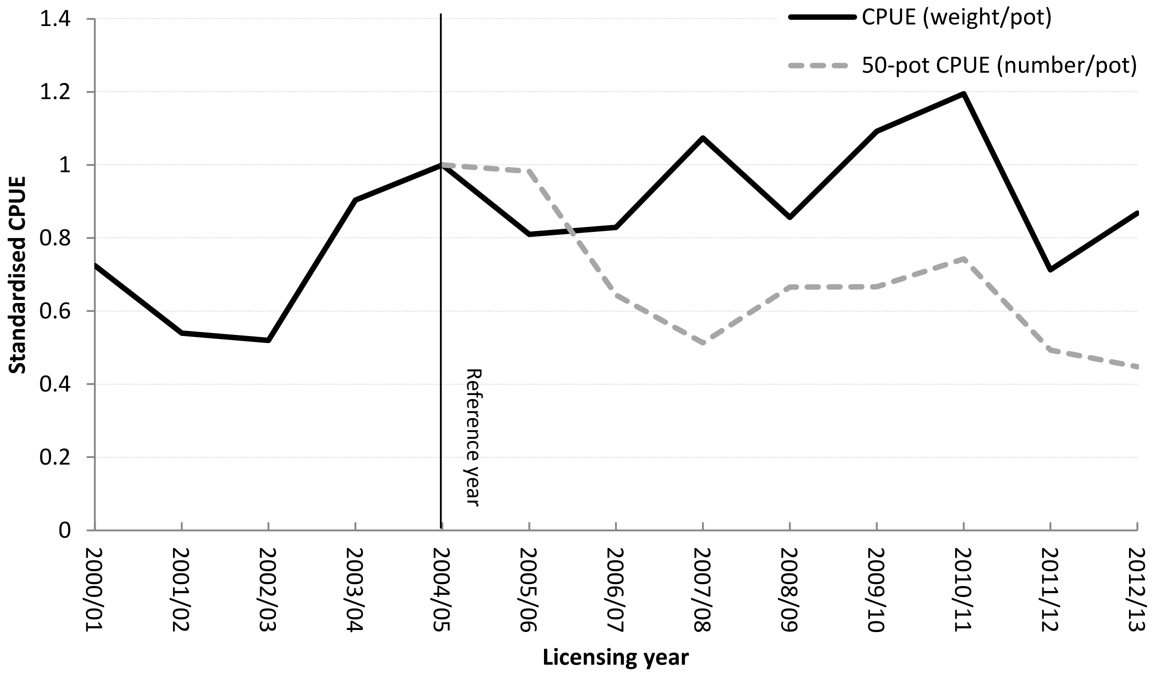


Figure 2.5 *Octopus pallidus* standardised catch per unit effort (CPUE) relative to 2004/05 levels in weight per pot (total commercial) and in number per pot (50-pot sampling).

Commercial catch from other fishing methods

Although historical total octopus bycatch has reached up to 30 t in the early 2000's, recent records of octopus bycatch has dropped, reaching around 2.8 t in 2012/13 (Fig. 2.6). Species are seldom recorded and 96% of the bycatch is qualified as unspecified octopus species. It is generally accepted that the rock lobster fishery octopus bycatch is predominantly *O. maorum*.

Most of the octopus bycatch in recent years originated from the rock lobster commercial fishery, with an average bycatch of 5.7 t per annum in the last five licensing years (Fig. 2.6). The commercial scalefish fishery provided the other source of octopus bycatch, although its contribution has dropped since 2007/08 (Fig. 2.6). Gears that produce the most catch are hand collection, graball nets, and crab pots. Hand collected octopus was once a targeted fishery in Eaglehawk Neck. The current pressure from other commercial fisheries does not appear excessive and does not show any upwards trends. The impact of octopus bycatch on the octopus stocks from these fisheries is therefore considered low at present.

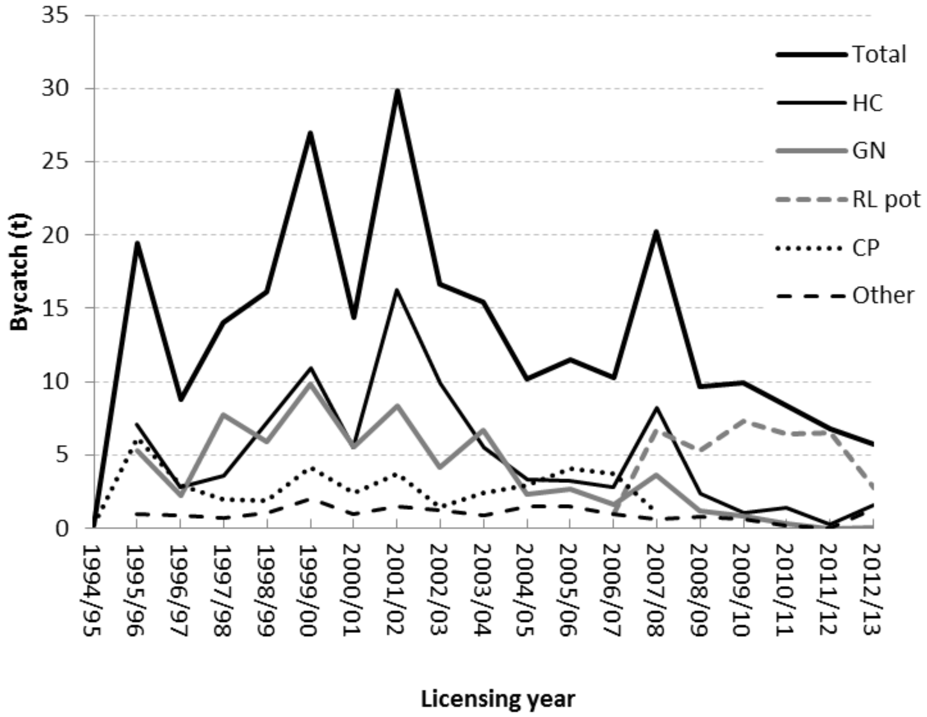


Figure 2.6 Octopus bycatch (tonnes) in other commercial fisheries. HC= hand collection, GN= graball net, RL pot= Rock lobster pots, CP= crab pot.

Recreational catch

Catch and effort information are not routinely available for the recreational fishery. Surveys of the recreational fishery conducted in 200/01 and 2007/08 provide the only comprehensive snapshots of the Tasmanian recreational fishery (Lyle 2005, Lyle et al. 2009). The recreational fishery surveys did not differentiate between cephalopod species with the exception of southern calamari and Gould's squid. It is, however, understood that the majority of the catch reported as "cephalopods, other" are actually octopus, the remaining portion being cuttlefish.

Octopus species are not the focus of the recreational fishery and appear as bycatch caught predominantly by lines, by gillnets and, to a lesser extent, pots. The impact of the recreational fishery on the octopus stocks is considered minimal.

Table 2.1 Estimated total recreational harvest numbers, number kept and % released for cephalopod taken by Tasmanian residents (refer to Lyle et al. 2009).
Note: the survey periods do not correspond with fishing years; 2000/01 represented the period May 2000 to Apr 2001, and 2007/08 represented the period Dec 2007 to Nov 2008.

Cephalopod, other	Number fished	Number kept	% released
2000/01	6,264	<1,000	85.3
2007/08	5,605	1,149	79.5

3. Fine-scale catch, effort and catch rates

Catch and catch rates have been analysed at the scale of the fishing block to examine the potential issue of localised depletion. Trends for each block have been calculated as the difference in catch and (unstandardised) CPUE between the current licensing year and the previous licensing year, as well as between the current licensing year and the average of the five previous licensing years (Figure 3.2).

Areas of high catches are off Stanley (4E1 and 4E3) and south-west of Flinders Island (4G2) (Figure 3.1A). While the effort around Stanley and south-west of Flinders Island has remained similar over the years, effort has shifted away from east Flinders towards the south-west of the island and the north-east coast of Tasmania in the year 2012/13 (Figure 3.1B). Catches in these areas have increased concomitantly.

While CPUE was high in the north west of the State and both east and west of Flinders over the years (Figure 3.1C), areas of high CPUE have contracted to south-west Flinders and Stanley in 2012/13.

The analyses of trend in catch, effort and CPUE between the current (2012/13) and the previous year (2011/12) confirms an increase in effort, catch and CPUE off Stanley, south-west Flinders and the north-east coast of Tasmania, concomitant with a decrease in effort, catch and CPUE for the blocks in north and east Flinders. Overall, CPUE has dropped for most blocks in northern Bass Strait from the previous year. The analyses of trend in catch, effort and CPUE between the current (2012/13) and the average of the five previous year (2007/08 to 2011/12) reveals a state-wide decline in CPUE except for south-west Flinders.

Significantly the trends in catch and catch-rate (Figure 3.2) are closely aligned, likely indicating that fishers are responding to changes in CPUE by shifting effort (and therefore catch) from areas with decreasing CPUE to areas with increasing CPUE. This is a positive factor in that the fleet is shifting its catch to those areas with highest abundance. The consistent decline in CPUE over time indicates serial depletion of the stock in the exploited area (i.e. northern Tasmania).

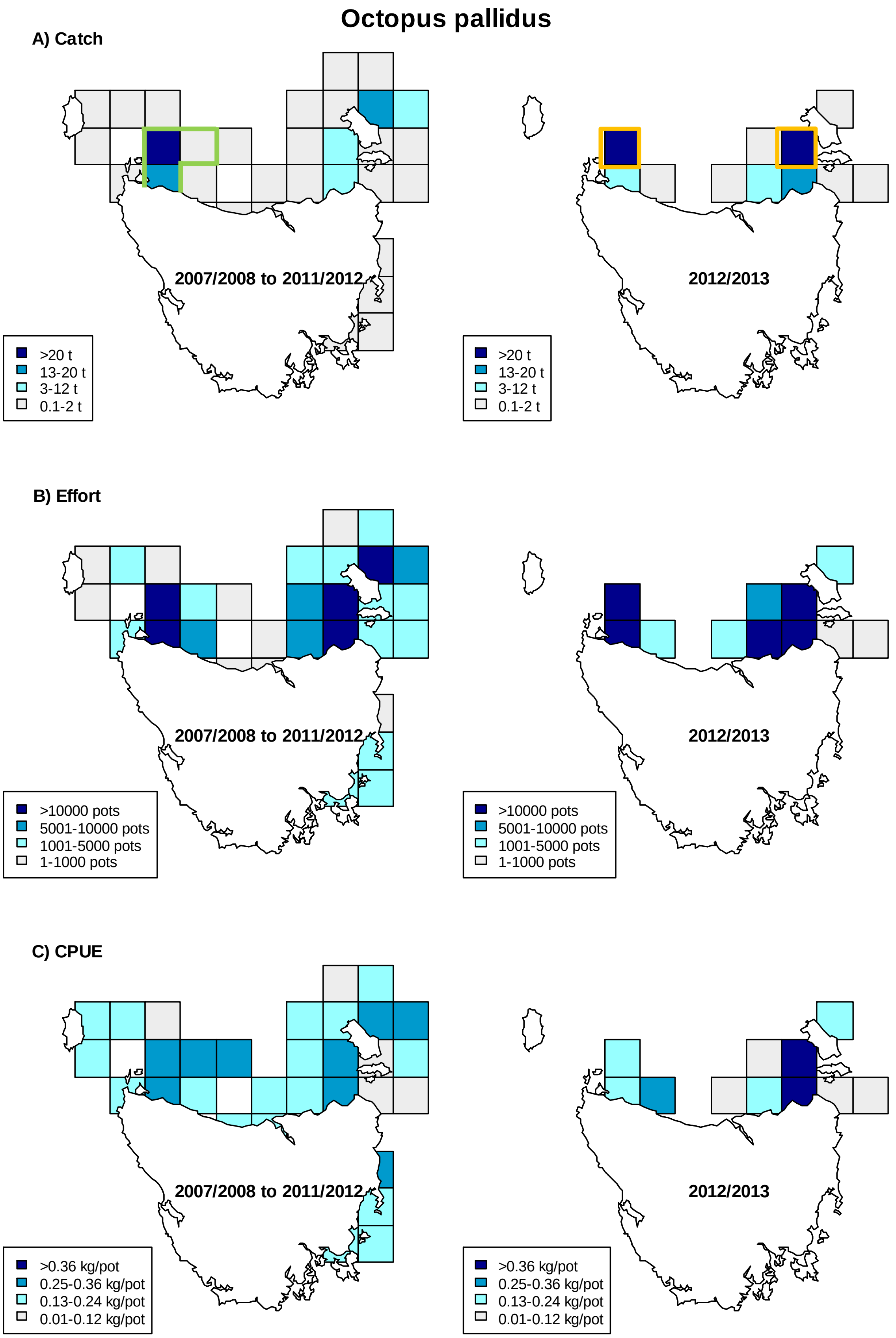


Figure 3.1 (A) Catch, (B) effort and (C) CPUE averaged over the last 5 years and for the licensing year 2011/12. Highlighted green blocks represent blocks where wildlife interaction has been recorded. Note that the number of interactions over time is very low. Highlighted orange blocks represent blocks for which exploitation rate are close to or higher than the recommended exploitation rate set by Leporati et al. (2009).

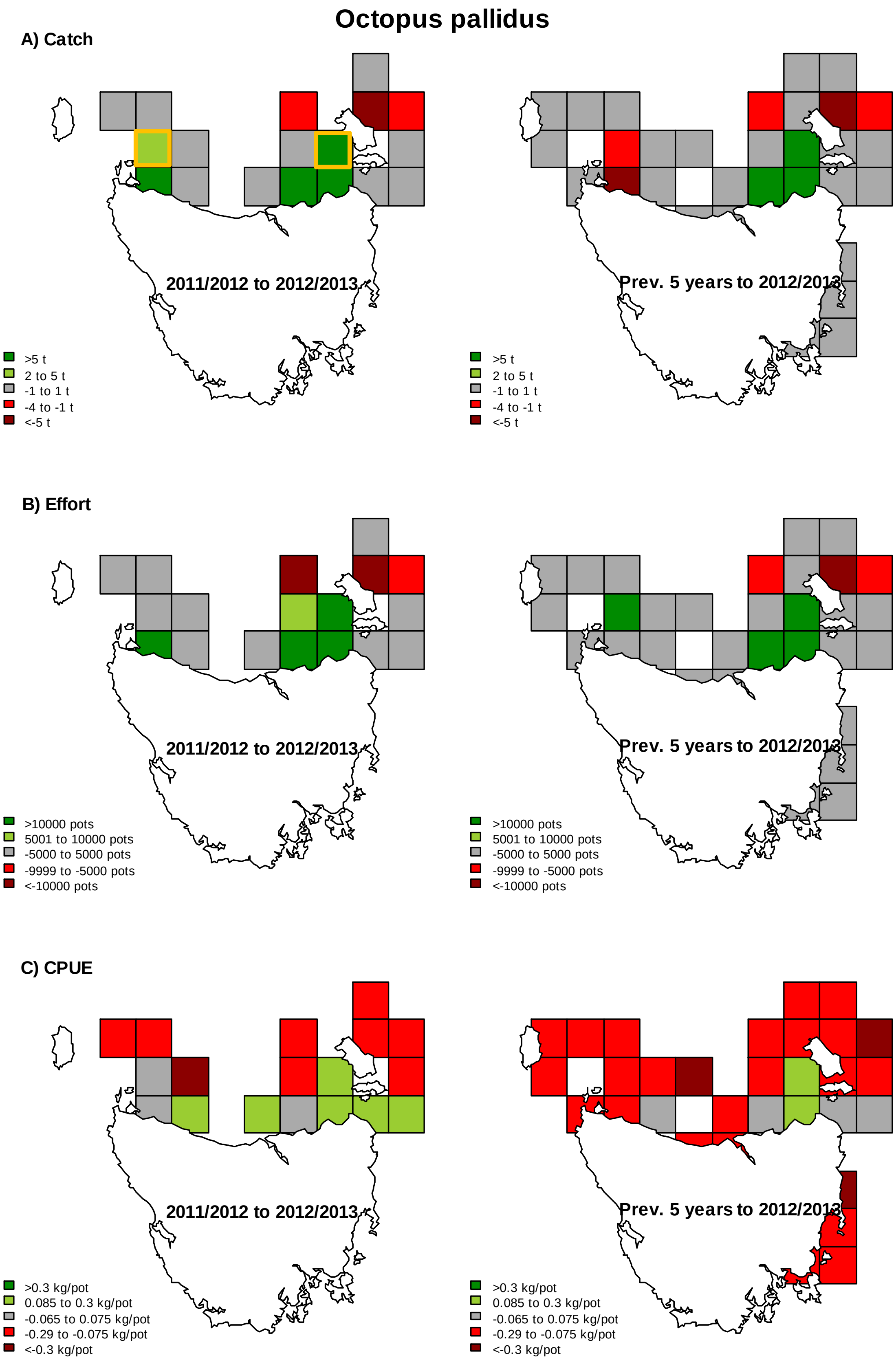


Figure 3.2 Trends in (A) catch, (B) effort and (C) CPUE by blocks between the 2012/13 and the previous year, and between the 2012/13 and the previous 5 years (2007/08 to 2011/12). Highlighted orange blocks represent blocks for which exploitation rate are close to or higher than the recommended exploitation rate set by Leporati et al. (2009).

4. Stock status

Two statewide reference points were breached (see below).

Performance indicators	Reference points	Breached ?	By how much?
Biomass	• Catch> highest catch value from the reference period	Yes	17.7 t
	• Catch< lowest catch value from the reference period	No	
Fishing mortality	• Numbers per pot < lowest value from the reference period	Yes	0.07 octopus/pot

As a precautionary approach, a previous study from Leporati *et al*. (2009) recommended to set the actual catch limit per fishing block to less than the 2005 single block maximum (33.4 t) in order to avoid overexploitation. The exploitation rate of block 4G2 has breached this limit in 2012/13 with an annual catch of 56.6 t. Block 4E1 has a long history of exploitation and is currently close to breaching the limit with an annual catch of 31.6 t. Future assessments will develop regional reference points to monitor the appropriate spatial distribution of catch.

STOCK STATUS	**TRANSITIONAL-DEPLETING**
Given trends in catch and the ongoing declining trend in CPUE over the last eight years, the *Octopus pallidus* stock is considered transitional depleting.	
STOCK	Tasmanian Octopus Fishery
INDICATORS	Catch, effort and CPUE trends

5. Bycatch and protected species interaction

Bycatch in the octopus pot fishery is low. While *O. pallidus* is the main target, pots also attract other octopus species such as *O. tetricus* (around 2 tonnes caught in 2011/12) and to a lesser extend *O. maorum* (less than 0.5 tonnes caught for that same licensing year).

Protected species interactions are also minimal, seals being the only species for which interactions have been recorded. These occurrences are relatively rare (28 interaction records since 2000/01) and result in losses in catch and gear damage. Most interactions appear to occur in blocks 4E1, 4E2 and 4E3.

The nature of the fishery and the specific gear used make interactions unlikely. Boats do not operate at night; hence birds are not attracted to working lights. There is no bait discarding issues since the pots are unbaited. Surface gear is minimal (two buoys and two ropes for each demersal line).

Entanglement of migrating whales in ropes of pot fisheries have been reported in Western Australia (WA Department of Fisheries 2010). While the Tasmanian octopus fishery operates in Bass Strait, part of which is in the migratory route of southern right whales (TAS Parks and Wildlife Service), no such interactions have been reported in Tasmania. Furthermore, the limited amount of surface gear, typically 40 buoys in the entire fishery at any one time is negligible in contrast to other pot fisheries, such as the Tasmanian Rock Lobster fishery where a single operator may have up to 50 sets of pots and ropes.

The octopus pots currently used in the fishery are lightweight and set in a sandy bottom environment, which is the preferred substrate for *O. pallidus*. The impact of commercial potting has been found to have little impact on benthic assemblages (Coleman et al. 2013) and is therefore considered minor.

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