



BALMAIN BUGS

Ibacus peronii, *Ibacus brucei*, *Ibacus chacei*, *Ibacus alticrenatus*, *Ibacus spp.*

John Stewart (Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales), **Brad Zeller** (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland)

STOCK STATUS OVERVIEW

Stock status determination

Jurisdiction	Stock	Fisheries	Stock status	Indicators
Queensland, New South Wales	East Coast	ECOTF, OTF	Sustainable	Catch rates, catch, size structure
South Australia	South Australia		Negligible	
Victoria	Victoria		Negligible	
Western Australia	Western Australia		Negligible	

ECOTF East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery (QLD)

OTF Ocean Trawl Fishery (NSW)

STOCK STRUCTURE

The common name 'Balmain Bug' refers to four similar species of fan lobster: *Ibacus alticrenatus*, *I. brucei*, *I. chacei* and *I. peronii*¹. These species partially overlap in their distributions on the east coast of Australia and have evolved different life-history strategies, tending to occupy different depth ranges. However, here, they are assessed as a single species group because they are rarely distinguished by fishers or fish marketers.

The true Balmain Bug (*I. peronii*) is widely distributed around the southern half of the continent, from around the Queensland–New South Wales border (latitude 28°S) to central Western Australia (latitude 29°S), including the east coast of Tasmania and Bass Strait. The true Balmain Bug is mainly found close to shore, in waters less than 80 m deep. The Smooth Bug (*I. chacei*) is distributed between northern Queensland (latitude 17°S) and southern New South Wales (latitude 36°S), although it is rarely caught south of Sydney (latitude 34°S). It is most abundant on the mid-continental shelf in depths of 50–150 m. The Honey Bug (*I. brucei*) is distributed between central Queensland and northern New South Wales. It is most abundant on the outer continental shelf and upper slope in waters from 120–300 m deep. The Deepwater Bug (*I. alticrenatus*) is distributed throughout southern Australian and New Zealand waters. It is most abundant at depths of 200–400 m on the upper continental slope, and stock structure remains unknown¹.

Given the prevailing influence of the East Australian Current along the east coast out to 150 m depth, a protracted pelagic larval phase and a northerly migration of older stages, true Balmain Bugs, Smooth Bugs and Honey Bugs are thought to each constitute single biological stocks across Queensland and New South Wales¹. Stock status of the Balmain Bugs species group in these jurisdictions is therefore presented at the biological stock level—East Coast biological stock.

Landings in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia are thought to be predominantly true Balmain Bugs (*I. peronii*). However, the stock relationship between Balmain Bugs caught in these jurisdictions and those caught off New South Wales and Queensland is unknown. Stock status in these jurisdictions is therefore presented at the jurisdictional management unit level.

STOCK STATUS

Western Australia

Stock status for the Western Australian management unit is reported as negligible due to low catches by this jurisdiction. Western Australian catch was less than 300 kg per annum in 2004–15.

East Coast

In New South Wales, Balmain Bugs (primarily true Balmain Bugs and Smooth Bugs) are trawl target species and have been assessed in terms of their commercial nominal catch rates and length compositions in landings. Median catch rates (kg per day in the ocean prawn trawl fishery) have fluctuated throughout the past 20 years but have shown no overall trends². The size compositions in landings have remained stable for both species². The above evidence indicates that the biomass of this part of the stock is unlikely to be recruitment overfished. Landings have declined slowly over the past decade, from an average of 36 tonnes (t) per year in 2006–10 to 28 t per year in 2011–15. Current landings are at historically low levels (19 t in 2015) as a result of a large reduction in fishing effort, with the number of days fished ocean prawn trawling in 2015 being less than 30 per cent of those fished in 2000. This reduction in fishing effort in combination with stable size compositions in landings indicates that fishing mortality is constrained in New South Wales waters to sustainable

levels. The above evidence indicates that the current level of fishing pressure is unlikely to cause this part of the stock to become recruitment overfished.

In Queensland, fishers harvest Balmain Bugs as a byproduct of Eastern King Prawn fishing. Logbook data indicates that Balmain bugs contribute only a very minor component of the Eastern King Prawn fishers' catch and landed value. Balmain Bugs fishing mortality is managed by a prohibition on landing of egg-bearing females; conservative minimum legal sizes (MLS), which were updated in 2009; and mandatory use of turtle excluder devices since the early 2000s, which have been shown to lower the incidental catch rates of scyllarid lobsters, including Balmain Bugs^{3,4}. In addition, the spawning stock is partly protected from fishing during an annual seasonal closure. Landings have declined over the past decade from an average of 93 t per year in 2006–10 to 79 t per year in 2011–15. While nominal catch rates have declined since 2011 and the 2015 catch was relatively low (66 t), this is considered to be a result of the increased MLS for *I. chacei* and fisher behaviour, and not declining abundance.

A recent risk assessment of the Queensland East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery found a low risk of recruitment overfishing on the Queensland part of the East Coast Balmain Bug stock at the 2009 effort level south of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park^{5,6}, where about 83 per cent of the catch is taken. Fishing effort targeting Eastern King Prawn in Queensland has declined by eight per cent since 2009, further reducing the risk of overfishing. The risk of recruitment overfishing within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) was assessed to be intermediate to high⁷. However, fishing effort in the GBRMP has declined by 24 per cent since 2009, further reducing risk for this part of the stock.

The above evidence indicates that the biomass of the Queensland part of the stock is unlikely to be recruitment overfished, and the current level of fishing pressure is unlikely to cause the stock to become recruitment overfished.

On the basis of the evidence provided above, the multispecies East Coast biological stock is classified as a **sustainable stock**.

Victoria

Stock status for the Victorian management unit is reported as negligible due to low catches by this jurisdiction. Victorian catch ranged from 10–16 t per annum in 2011–15.

South Australia

Stock status for the South Australian management unit is reported as negligible due to low catches by this jurisdiction. South Australian average catch was 5.2 t per annum in 2006–15.

BIOLOGY

Balmain Bugs biology^{1,8–13}

Biology

Species	Longevity / Maximum Size	Maturity (50 per cent)
BALMAIN BUGS	Balmain Bug: 15 years; 86 mm <u>CL</u> Smooth Bug: 5–7 years; 80 mm <u>CL</u> Honey Bug: longevity largely unknown; maximum <u>CL</u> in Queensland samples is 72 mm for females and 66 mm for males Deepwater Bug: longevity largely unknown; maximum <u>CL</u> in Queensland samples is 55 mm for both females and males	Balmain Bug: 2 years; 50 mm <u>CL</u> Smooth Bug: 2 years; 55 mm <u>CL</u> Honey Bug: 47 mm <u>CL</u> Deepwater Bug: 45 mm <u>CL</u>

DISTRIBUTIONS



Distribution of reported commercial catch of Balmain Bugs

TABLES

Fishing methods

	Western Australia	Queensland	New South Wales	Victoria	South Australia
Commercial					
Unspecified	✓			✓	✓
Otter Trawl		✓	✓		
Indigenous					
Diving			✓		
Recreational					
Diving			✓		

Management methods

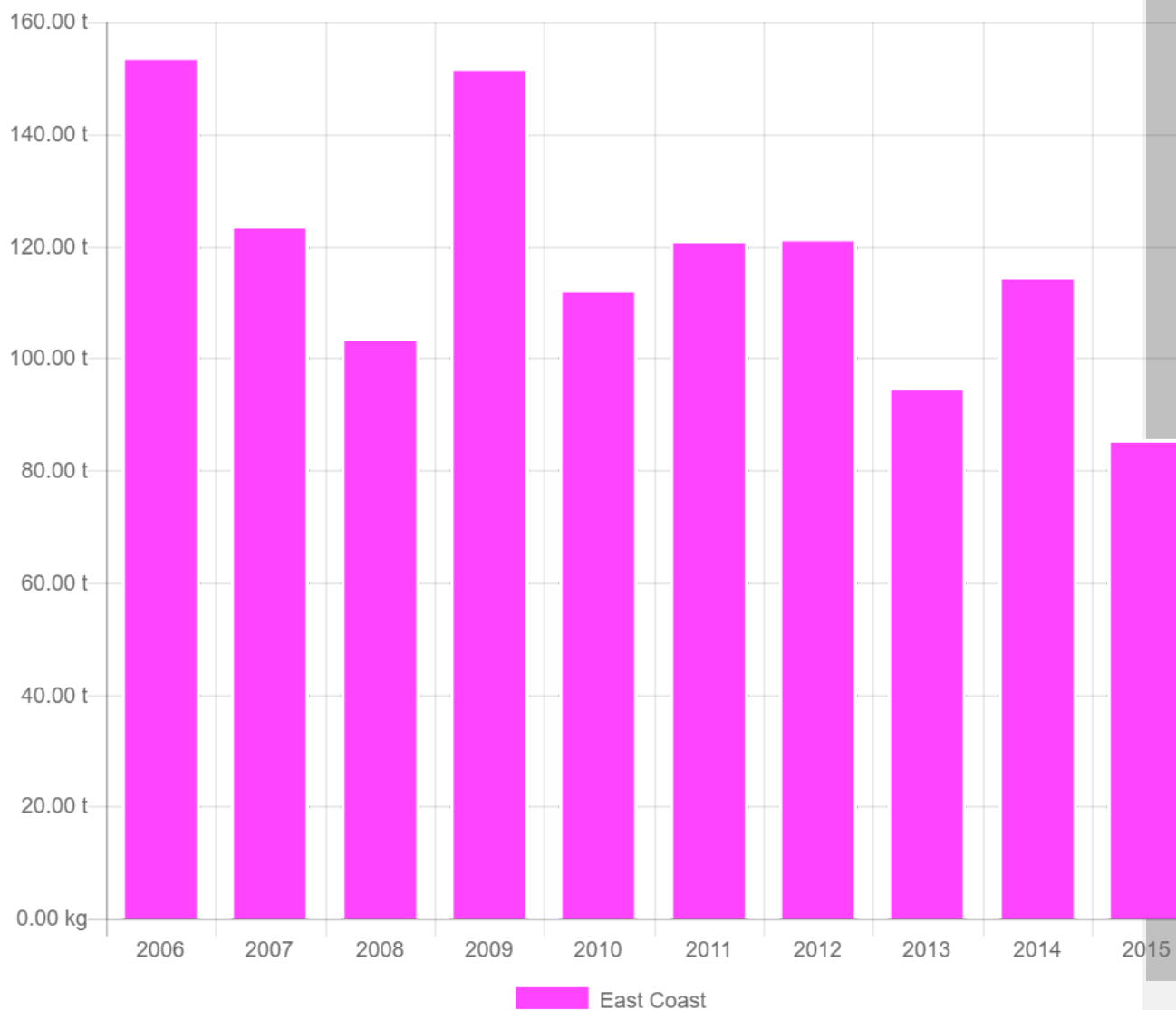
Method	Western Australia	Queensland	New South Wales	Victoria	South Australia
Commercial					
Limited entry		✓	✓		
Size limit		✓	✓		
Spatial closures			✓		
Vessel restrictions		✓	✓		
Indigenous					
Bag limits			✓		
Section 31 (1)(c1), Aboriginal cultural fishing authority			✓		
Size limit			✓		
Spatial closures			✓		
Recreational					
Bag limits			✓		
Size limit			✓		
Spatial closures			✓		

Active vessels

	Western Australia	Queensland	New South Wales	Victoria	South Australia
		154 in ECOTF	88 in OTF		

ECOTF = East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery (OITF)

CATCH CHART



◀ Commercial catch of Balmain Bugs ▶

EFFECTS OF FISHING ON THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

- The East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery (Queensland) interacts with a number of protected species, including turtles and sea snakes ^{14,15}. Turtle excluder devices and bycatch reduction devices are deployed by all boats to reduce the amount of bycatch ¹⁶. Fisher compliance with legislated design principles and best practice use of these devices is mandatory to ensure they function effectively to limit capture of turtles and sea snakes. Interactions with these species are monitored through 'Species of Conservation Interest' logbooks ¹⁷.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ON BALMAIN BUGS

- The major environmental factor influencing the Balmain Bug biological stock is likely to be the southerly flow of the East Australian Current. The impact of changes in the East Australian Current on recruitment of these species is currently unknown ^{1,10}.

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