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Tasmania - staying ahead of AVG

Tasmanian abalone divers are taking disease surveillance to new levels. They are reporting their observations on wild stock as part of the biosecurity plan against a serious threat, abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG).

Tasmania's abalone industry is embracing biosecurity to protect its future viability and value. It is a multi-million dollar industry in Tasmania, producing 25% of the world's abalone and contributing around \$106 million per year to the national economy.



Dr Kevin Ellard, Veterinary Officer with the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, said while the two cases of AVG in this state, back in 2008 and 2009, have been controlled and eradicated from the affected premises, there is still a lot of work to do.

“Since the outbreak of AVG in Victoria in 2007, the Tasmanian abalone industry has been putting biosecurity and emergency disease outbreak plans in place.” said Dr Ellard.

“We will soon be rolling out an Abalone Biosecurity Plan, as the proposed model for other aquaculture and fishing industries in Tasmania. This will complement our existing strong border biosecurity measures.”



“Divers have for some time been requested to monitor the health of wild and farmed abalone stocks for signs of AVG or other problems. Their observations are an invaluable resource for our biosecurity plan.”

Abalone viral ganglioneuritis is caused by a herpes-like virus, leading to inflammation of the nervous tissue and resulting in paralysis, curling of the foot and swelling of the mouth of the abalone, followed by death. The disease is thought to be spread through the mucus that is released by infected and dying abalone. There is also potential for disease spread by humans on clothing, equipment, boats and vehicles contaminated with infected mucus.

To prevent the spread of the disease, recreational divers and fishermen are advised to:

- Not shuck abalone at sea or use abalone as fishing bait – this is illegal in Tasmania. Take all abalone waste with you and dispose of it at home so that there is no risk of spread
- Clean and dry all boats, fishing and diving equipment, including catch bags, gloves, knives, measuring devices, wetsuits, buoyancy vests, masks, regulators and tanks. Allow them to dry in the sun.
- Report any signs of disease to Disease Watch Hotline 1800 675 888 even if you are not sure what disease might exist.
- Not bring abalone or abalone products into Tasmania from interstate.

The virus that causes AVG is now thought to exist in the wild in Tasmania and can become a problem when wild abalone are brought together at high density in a tank environment. Stress, high density and a closed water system can contribute to the virus building up to lethal concentrations.



Tasmanian divers are undertaking some training in how to recognise the signs of AVG and how to put biosecurity measures in place in their day-to-day operations.

Dr Ellard said Tasmania is using the lessons learnt in Victoria.

“We’ve made big changes to biosecurity requirements for our abalone fishery, processing plants and divers. These include:

- Biosecurity accreditation for all farms and processing plants;
- Where appropriate, limiting movement of abalone from zone to zone within the state;
- Compulsory requirement for biosecure holding facilities on-farm for all wild brood stock; and
- Restricting waste water from processors being released untreated back into wild fishery zones

The virus caused devastation to some Victorian abalone fisheries during the outbreak in 2007, virtually wiping out some wild fishery zones in that state.

Photo captions –

- 1) Black lip abalone (source - K.Ellard, Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment)
- 2) Sick and weak abalone (source - K.Ellard, Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment)