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## **MEDIA RELEASE Females are the key**

The NT Seafood Council believes a short term move to protect female mud crabs now will speed the recovery of the fishery when recruitment is bolstered by normal wet seasons.

'High dependence on rainfall and low stock numbers following three unprecedented poor wet seasons has left NT Seafood Council supporting taking action now that could improve the future of the Mud Crab fishery,' said NT Seafood Council Chief Executive Officer, Mrs Katherine Winchester.

'A 'no take' of female mud crabs from the Gulf of Carpentaria for all fishers is being recommended to take place effective 1 September 2016 until the end of the 2017 season to allow as much breeding and growth of females as possible.

'The fishery is not in danger of collapsing and recruitment is still occurring despite the recent series of low wets, however with more favourable wets forecast it would seem prudent to do everything to maximise recruitment when this occurs.

'Forecast modelling scenarios show a slow recovery, leaving industry faced with a dilemma of ongoing lower catches with a slow increase each year or taking short term action to boost the recovery.

'The conservative management arrangements and ongoing research that we have had in place in the NT have allowed adequate time to assess this without risking the long term status of the fishery.

'Given the serious environmental challenges being faced in the Gulf of Carpentaria it is critical that all sectors take action to assist the recovery, leaving female crabs in the environment during this time of low population is a practical and effective solution. It has been reassuring that even with the environmentally poor conditions there has been recruitment success which shows the resilience of the mud crab.'

'We have written to all our Mud Crab members advising our intention to take this recommendation into the next Mud Crab Fishery Management Advisory Committee (MCFMAC) meeting, which is scheduled for 18 August 2016.

Making this recommendation doesn't come lightly as Industry acknowledges that there is a significant financial and social cost to them to undertake this action.

'Further solutions must be developed to aid both the recovery of Mud Crabs in the Gulf and the livelihood's of the people that rely on the fishery for income - this will be the focus of an industry meeting prior to the MCFMAC and ongoing discussions with government.

'Concerns over the recovery of crab numbers in the Gulf of Carpentaria have been at the forefront for mud crab fishers for the past few years, as the poor wet seasons has dramatically impacted recruitment and therefore harvest volumes.' Mrs Winchester went on to say.

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