Minister for Fisheries, Kon Vatskalis, expects to receive recommendations by the end of the week on the best way to combat the decline in catches in the commercial mud crab fishery.

Mr Vatskalis said the Mud Crab Advisory Committee (MAC) has been closely examining the issues affecting the future sustainability of the mud crab industry since November, and he now looks forward to receiving their final recommendations.

“Stakeholders in the fishery have spent many months considering measures to ensure the future viability of the industry,” said Mr Vatskalis.

“This action was prompted by reduced catches - mainly in the Gulf – by commercial operators over recent years. Overall, catches in the commercial mud crab fishery have declined from 1139 tonnes in 2001 to 425 tonnes in 2004. The average size of mud crabs in the commercial fishery catch has also declined.

“Those in the industry are aware that the fishery must continue to be managed in a sustainable manner. Current effort levels in the commercial mud crab fishery are being considered and will probably require some precautionary changes.”

The Minister has given the Mud Crab Advisory Committee (MAC) until COB this Thursday (7/07/2005) to report back with its recommendations.

“This has been a long and complex process involving scientists, recreational anglers, commercial fishermen and the NT Seafood Council, but I expect that we will soon be able to finalise management adjustments to the commercial fishery to ensure the future sustainability of the fishery,” said Mr Vatskalis.

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