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FTA A 'GAME CHANGER' FOR SOUTHERN ROCK LOBSTER INDUSTRY - BUT STATES MUST STEP UP

Southern Rocklobster Ltd (SRL), which represents the national southern rock lobster industry, today welcomed the announcement of the slashing of tariff and import duties for rock lobsters as part of the successful conclusion to 9 years of negotiations for an Australia-China Free Trade Agreement.

Ross Hodge, Executive Officer of SRL, congratulated the Abbott Government and in particular, Minister Andrew Robb and his negotiating team for delivering the much-needed FTA, which was set to become a 'game changer' for the \$300 million + pa rock lobster export industry.

"It's been outstanding performance by the Government", he said "in delivering the trifecta of FTA's with our three largest export markets, China, Japan and South Korea, within a year". "This ambitious goal was derided in some circles as 'pure fantasy' when it was announced but the Government has delivered" he added.

"It is now up to the industry to make the most of the opportunities that these FTAs have given us", he said.

"These new opportunities will flow not only from a reduction in tariffs and import duties but also from the ability to more easily export directly to China instead of through third countries" Mr Hodge explained.

"However, State Governments, which are responsible for managing the fisheries, must now move quickly on regulatory reform and infrastructure development if the benefits of the FTA are to be realised" he added.

"The industry, which is a mainstay of regional economic growth in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, is burdened by red tape, over-regulation and poor supporting infrastructure which must be addressed" he explained. "Otherwise, these will continue to put a 'handbrake' on the sustainable development of the industry".

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Fast Facts:

- Australian Rock Lobster is the most valuable wild caught fisheries product in Australia - landings are 8,700t pa valued at \$AU384 million or 17% of all Australian seafood production
- The two main species caught in Australia (92% of the catch) are southern rock lobster which is captured in SA, Tasmania and Victoria and western rock lobster which is captured in WA.
- 84% of rock lobster production is exported, most of it (more than 90%) as live product
- China is the largest market, taking 85% of rock lobster exports.
- There are no direct air shipping facilities from either Adelaide or Hobart so product has to be trans-shipped via Melbourne for export
- Rock lobster account for over 10% by value of all Australian food exports to China, more than either the Australian wine (\$240 million) or dairy (\$233 million) industries
- Southern rock lobsters are in a high demand in China and bring premium prices as a result of their quality and reputation. This reputation is underpinned by the industry's Clean Green® product standard, the only independently audited seafood standard in the world and which establishes minimum best practice criteria for product safety & quality, environmental management, resource sustainability and a safe working environment.