



7 May 2010

The Hon. R. L. Brown, MLC
Chair
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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LEGISLATIVE
COUNCIL

SL10/117

Dear Chair

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING – ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ASKED OF THE
NSW SEAFOOD INDUSTRY COUNCIL

1. Has the increase in recreational access and corresponding fall in commercial access to fishing grounds resulted in an increase in the price of fish for consumers?

G.Turk:

The short answer is yes, prices increased following the declaration of recreational fishing havens. Attached are graphs showing average selling prices in each year 1995-2010, for the top 10 estuary harvested NSW seafood products sold at Sydney Fish Market's wholesale auction. There is a clear upward price trend following recreational fishing havens for at least 6 of these species.

G.Byrnes:

- Local species of fish now unprocurable in some places
- Loss of fish variety
- Heavier concentration of imported fish (interstate and overseas) for consumers

M.Howard:

I would not only question whether there has been a change in value to consumers but also availability of local product.

The question does not clarify price of local product or imported product it just generalises.

Today for example retail Cooked Hawkesbury Prawns are cheaper than they were three years ago, that is if you can buy them, (2009-10 was not a good estuary season) however if you were to put them in the market the wholesale price has dropped considerably for cooked and green.

ABARE states in its 2006 report that "Production in Australia has recently been affected by unfavourable movements in a number of important macroeconomic variables. Fishing effort and catches have been influenced by cost increases, particularly fuel prices, which have reduced profit margins for operators. Many Fisheries have also been affected by reductions in total allowable catches, changes to access arrangements and more restrictive input controls. The appreciation of the Australian dollar since 2002-03 has simultaneously made exports less competitive and imports more attractive to consumers."

The recreational fishing only havens (RFOH) occurred from 2002 on. Across the Estuaries and Ocean there are also many no-go zones in existence for commercial fishers outside of the Marine Parks and RFOH areas.

Note: The reduction of commercial fishing effort has been happening since at least 1987. It should be noted that: *fishnote* ISSN 1034-7704 second edition dated 1990 F.B. Prokop, Special Fisheries Officer makes the following comments to recreational fishers. "The number of licensed commercial fishermen has dropped by 37%, from 4300 to 2700 in the last ten years. There has also been a freeze on the issue of new commercial licences since August 1987".

. Particulars NSW	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
NSW Gross Value	Down to \$120 million	Up to \$127million	Up \$130 million
Wild harvest Gross Value	Down to \$74.6 million	Up to \$80.7million	Down to \$77 million
Wild Harvest production			Down by 11%

This table 1: ABARE figures quoted

Note: Australian Gross Value production from 2000-01 to 2007-08 has dropped by 39%

2. When Recreational Fishing Havens were established was there sufficient buy-out of commercial interests? If not, what has been the effect of this?

G.Byrnes:

There is no doubt insufficient commercial fishing interests were purchased as a result of the establishment of RFH's. Indeed, this deficiency has carried through to the creation of commercial fishing exclusion areas with the establishment of marine parks. Combined, the result has been too many commercial fishers attempting to make a living from too few fishing grounds remaining.

Broadly, one of the aims when removing commercial fishing effort as a result of creating RFH's was to ensure minimal 'effort shift'. That is, through buy-outs, ensuring there is no net increase in commercial fishing taking place in any one area or fishing ground. In retrospect, it would be fair to say that there has been significant effort shift. In some places this has been more serious than others.

The impact of this has been profound upon commercial fishers and their families in both an economic and social sense. In economic terms it has resulted in diminishing returns to the commercial fisher with more commercial fishers competing for the available resource, an increase in fishing effort - more fishing

effort going into catching the same (or even lesser) volumes of fish, commercial fishers travelling ever further to catch fish and for those commercial fishers who decide they have had enough of this situation and choose to sell, they are left with fishing access rights they have great difficulty in selling – no one wants to buy into this situation. In social terms there has been added strain on families and household budgets, rising tensions between commercial fishers (competing for the fish) and local communities – vandalism of boats and vehicles at boat ramps and the like.

In recognition of this parlous situation, the Seafood Industry Advisory Council (the peak advisory body to the Minister for Primary Industries) has recommended to the minister a reduction in this excess fishing capacity through removing 50% of active fishing capacity and 100% of latent fishing capacity. This is a very challenging task considering only a small amount industry funds is available to achieve these goals. Essentially what is needed is significant funding to remedy this situation.

M.Howard:

It is my understanding that Recreational Fishing Havens bought out all effort from these areas. I would argue that the reduction in commercial fishing effort and access to areas has been more than adequate. I would also argue that to maintain sustainability of fish stocks and product to the three quarters of the community who do not recreational fish then a reassessment of all closures is necessary.

The overall affect of the creation of recreational fishing havens has meant that some fishers have taken the buyout from the specific closure area, but have increased their effort in other areas that they have purchased endorsements to fish in. If the fisher they have bought out didn't work as hard then there is a subsequent increase in effort.

Example 1: The Hawkesbury Estuary Prawn Trawl Fishery now has an increase in effort because of fishers who have taken a buyout from a closed area and now increase the effort in the Hawkesbury River - I would imagine that this has been replicated across the state – It certainly did in the Shoalhaven estuary general fishery.

Example 2: Is there eel fishing allowed in the Georges River? Why not? What has happened to the live export of eels? My understanding is that it has collapsed.

What is not mentioned here is that recreational fishers have not reduced their access to commercial fishing grounds. The fact is that there is continual promotion for more recreational fishing across the state.

If again we use the Hawkesbury as an example it is estimated that Prawn trawlers would access less than 4% of this estuary on any one week day (keeping in mind that they can only work on weekdays less public holidays) This fishery is seasonal so many fishers may only work 9 months of the year. Yet the prawn trawl fishery is targeted as the prime culprit for depleting fish stocks. This is nonsense. Think about the size of the Hawkesbury River, less than 50% is open to prawn trawling and within the open area fishers are also restricted in where they can actually prawn.

What remains in the fishery is a percentage of shareholders who have low effort and these are potential effort – An increase in effort in the Hawkesbury Prawn Trawl Fishery would have significant impacts.

The use of the word 'sufficient' has me concerned. I believe that there is a management process that is not being made clear.

Commercial fishing is now being pushed into a regime that if a fisher is not a full time fisher and not earning "x" then that fisher seems to be considered not worth keeping.

The removal of active fishers and closure of areas has meant that those who really want to fish for a living will buy another endorsement. The problem remains that NSW Fisheries have allowed the retention of what is known as latent effort to remain and the recreational buy-outs are not interested in buying out latent effort.

Where commercial fishers had a greater area to fish they could fish without overfishing specific areas. In the main NSW fisheries had remained sustainable and contrary to popular belief have sustainable fisheries to support this fact. There seems to be a notion that the sustainability of fish in estuaries and the ocean is due mainly to the practices of commercial fishers. This is not fact – sustainability of fish stocks relies on climate, state growth, zoning and development planning inclusive of the management of drinking water, effluent, diffuse water as well as recreational and commercial fishing effort.

3. Your submissions argue that existing Recreational Fishing Havens should be re-assessed and commercial access possibly allowed. If this was to occur, do you propose that the commercial sector would need to purchase access rights?

G.Byrnes:

In the first instance what is needed is a mechanism through which the two sectors can come together and negotiate an outcome. In many cases what the commercial fishery is looking for is access to RFH's for the purpose of targeting commercially valuable (yet recreationally insignificant) species of fish such as eels and mullet.

During a commercial industry consultation tour in 2009 conducted by representatives of the Seafood Industry Advisory Council the message was clear from the broader industry – commercial fishers were prepared to negotiate with the recreational sector for access to RFH's and pay for that access through contractual agreement. What is missing is an appropriate negotiating mechanism.

M.Howard:

I go back to my submission and my argument:

- ❖ The NSW commercial fishery has been reduced in capacity from nearing 6000, participants in the 1940's, 4000 in the early 1980's and now nearing the 1000 mark with the view that commercial fishers needed to be reduced for sustainability of fish stocks.(see *NSW Commercial Fisheries Statistics 1940 – 1992 B.C. Pease and A. Grinberg NSW Fisheries 1995*) and (NSW

Fisheries Status of Fisheries Resources 2001/2002. Dr Steve Kennelly, Ms Tracy McVea 2003).

Commercial fisher's records can demonstrate for example, that in Lake Macquarie they caught tonnes of a variety of fin fish annually and that from 1955 through to 2002 they were consistently harvesting fish from the lake each year pending variable climatic conditions. Increased rainfall would in turn increase production. Lake Macquarie: 1954/55 - 229,845 kg; 1989/90 - 272,788kg; 2001/02 - 267,326 kg. The same would apply in most of the Recreational Fishing havens created across the state.

What is the recreational catch in these areas for the corresponding period? It is unknown. What we do know is that 10% take 90% of the catch according to Paul O'Connor's evidence to the enquiry. Further evidence to the enquiry has implied that there is a quarter of the population that recreational fish.

What we do not have is the assessment of the area allocated to commercial fishers to sustainably and economically provide fish equitably to the rest of the community.

4. Your submissions note that the commercial fishing industry is often unfairly denigrated in terms of its practices and effect on the fish resource. How can the industry respond to this and improve the public perception?

G.Turk:

There are two essential actions necessary to balance public perception. The first is for industry to collate all of the available data on its sustainability, identify gaps in that information and undertake any necessary research to address these gaps.

The environmental impact assessments of each fishery and the resultant Fishery Management Strategies specify where risks have been identified and fishery management action taken to address these risks. There is also a vast amount of other work that has been carried out by government, industry and academia.

The second necessary action is the dissemination and communication of industry's sustainability credentials to the public. An excellent example of this is the "Aussie Seafood - Brought to you by our Fishermen" campaign. A copy of the final report from this campaign is enclosed.

Such programs, however, require significant funds to implement and industry in the past has been unwilling or unable to raise the necessary funds without government assistance.

G.Byrnes:

- Need the support of government to highlight environmental/sustainability credentials of industry - all industry put through the rigors of EPA Act.
- Need to differentiate NSW commercial fisheries (and Australian fisheries) from the problems of the rest of the world - we all are tarred with the one brush in the media (e.g. ABC 7.30 Report 5/5/10)

- Need change of approach at government level in terms of negative connotations. Legislation/regulation often says 'waters protected from commercial fishing', official signage around some waterways says the same, terminologies need to be changed such as 'overfished'(the public thinks this means a fish species is bordering on extinction), etc.
- Need funds to do all this that the industry does not have.

M.Howard:

While it is easy to argue that since money from Recreational Fishers Trust has been used to buy-out the Commercial fishers and therefore Commercial fishers should have to pay to be able to access these areas, I would argue that this highlights the intrinsic bias in this legislative management process.

Recreational fishers have access to both the Commercial fishers share and the recreational fishers share - but at no time have the recreational fishers had to buy their original access to any waters other than paying a licence fee to the trust. The land and Environment Courts endorsed that the legislation for the fee paid is a money raising venture not a licence to fish.


It is my view that this now means that commercial fishers are faced with a fee to have access to what should be a commercial fishers rights to access and to be equitably sharing these resources. Commercial fishers are not consuming the fish they are catching fish that is a whole of community owned resource. The 'fish' do not belong to the recreational fishers.

I believe that the sharing of the resource has been inappropriately managed and that the managers of the community resources need to assess this and its impacts to members of the community who no longer have the luxury of eating fish from at least 30 recreational only havens across the state.

Should the commercial fishers pay to access the resource? No.

Should the commercial fisher pay to buy shares in a fishery with access in Recreational Fishing Haven Areas? That's a different question.

Yours sincerely

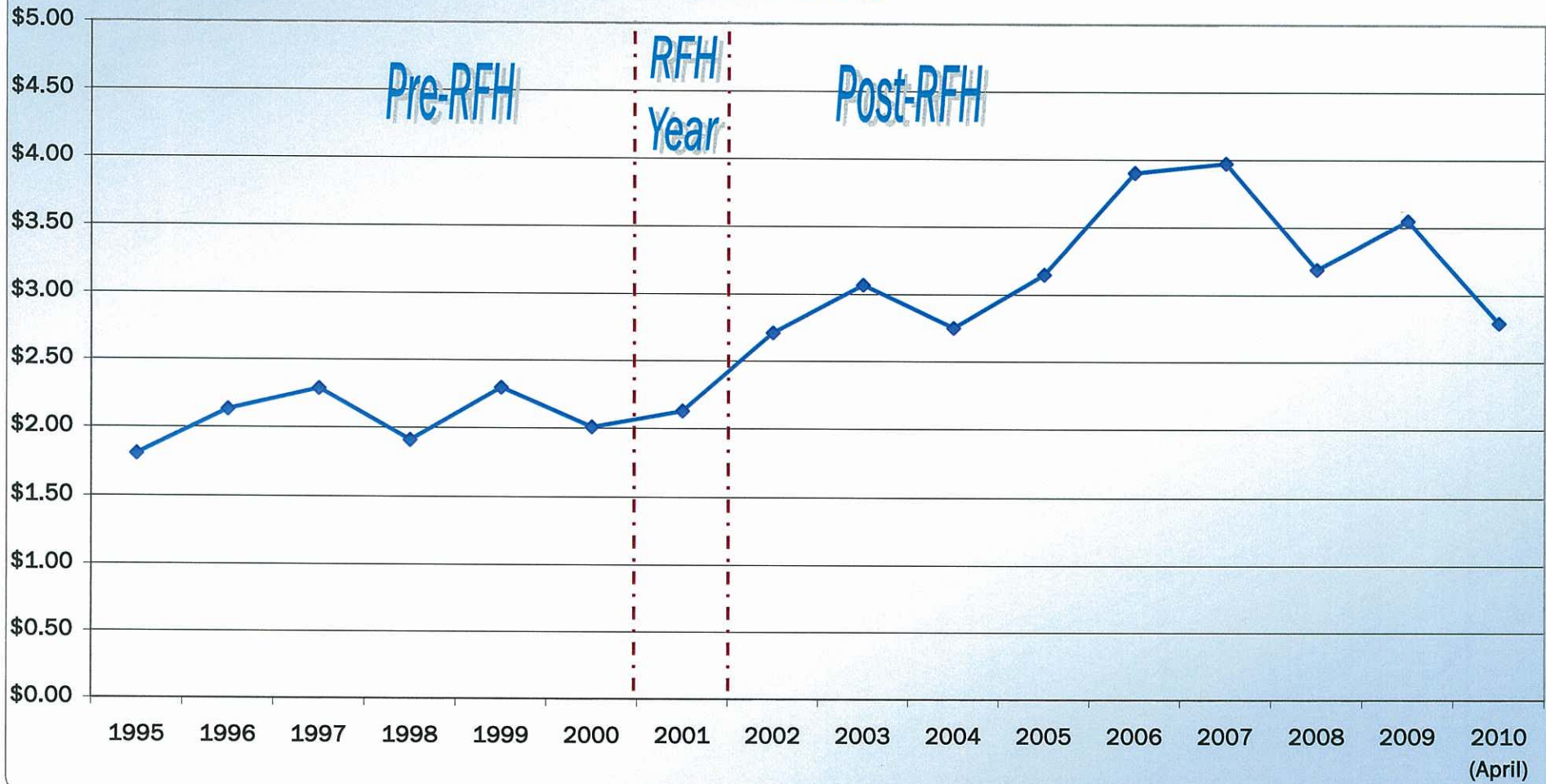


Grahame Turk
Chair, NSWIC

Encl. 2

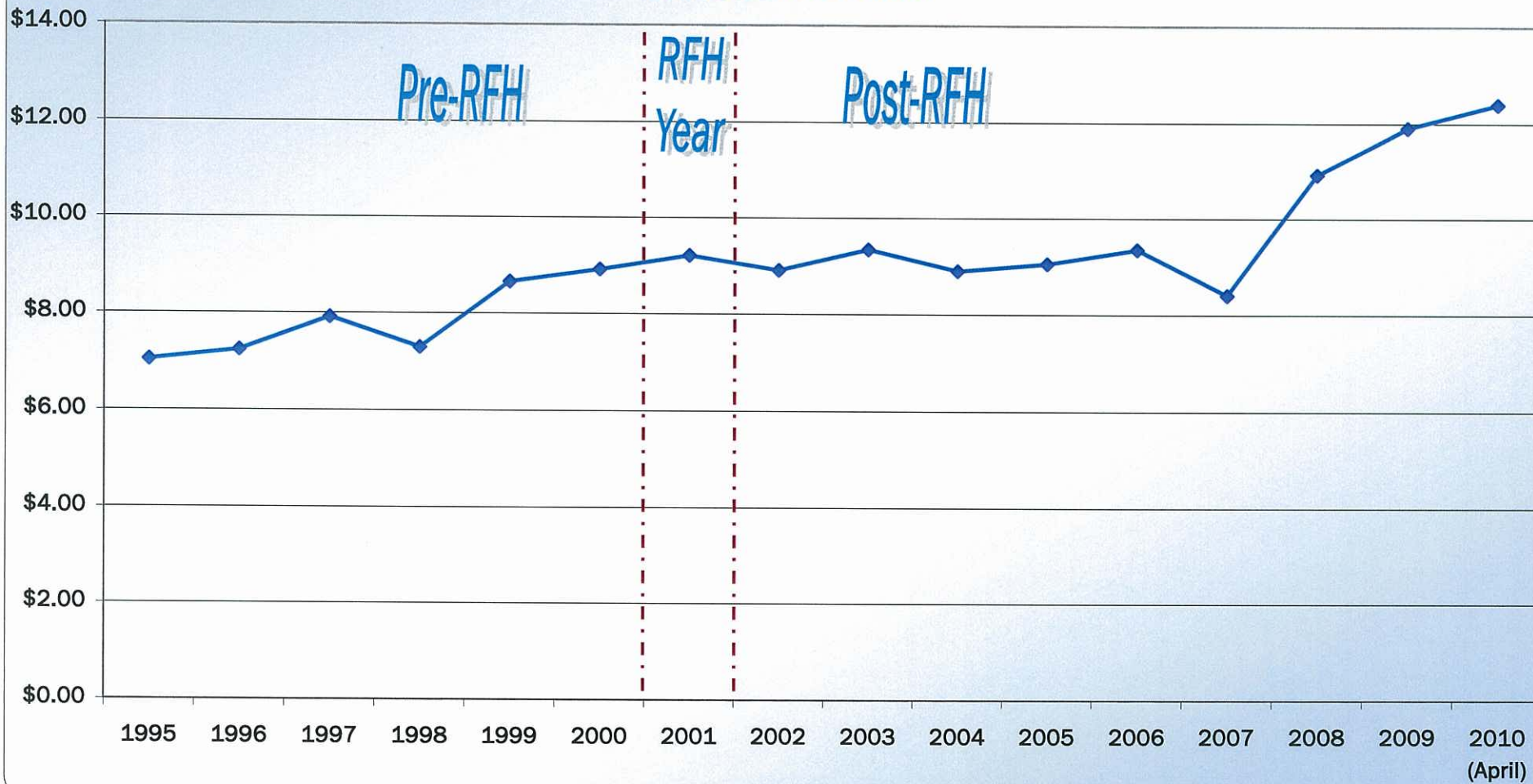
Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

Silver Bidy



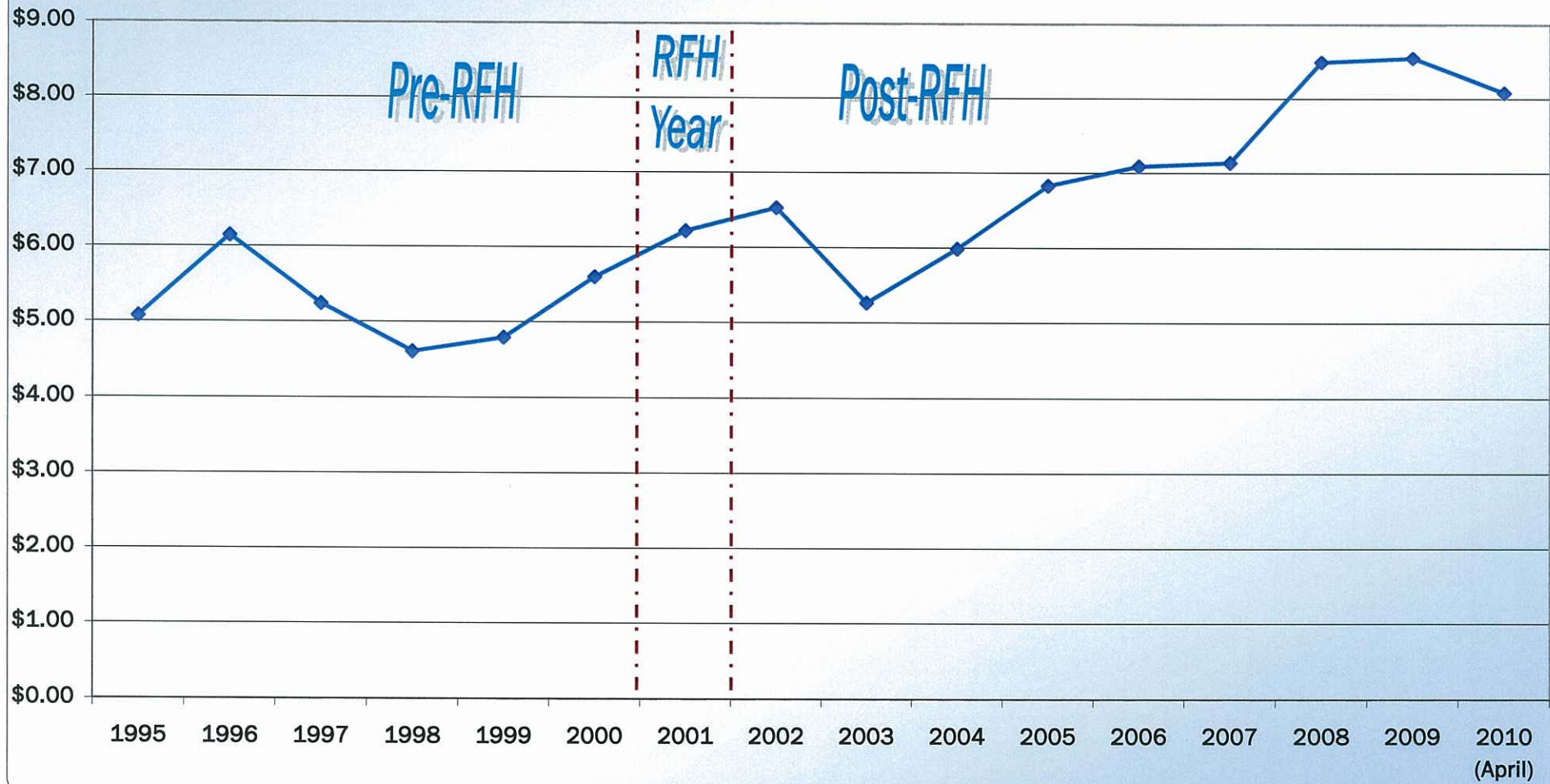
Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

Yellowfin Bream

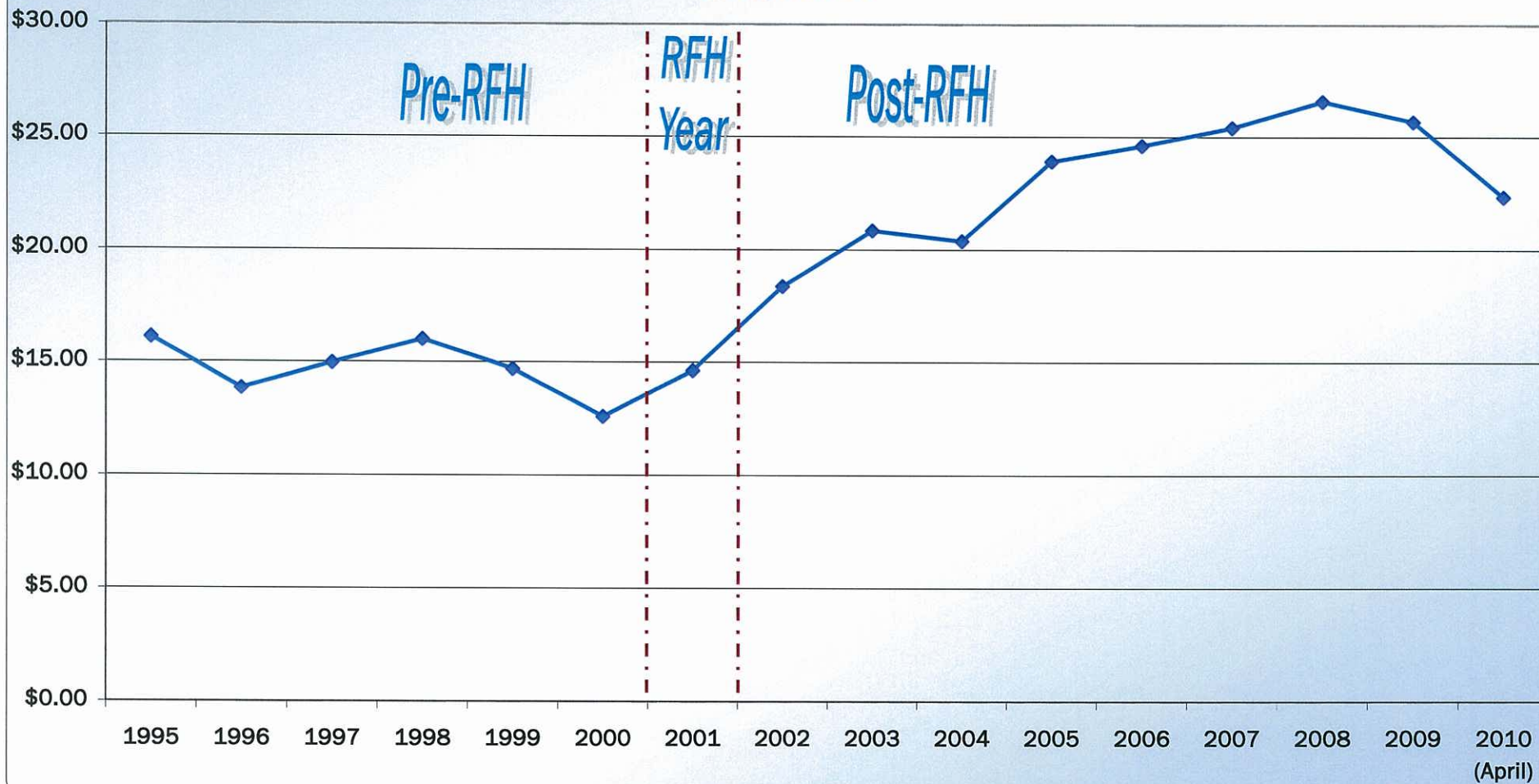


Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

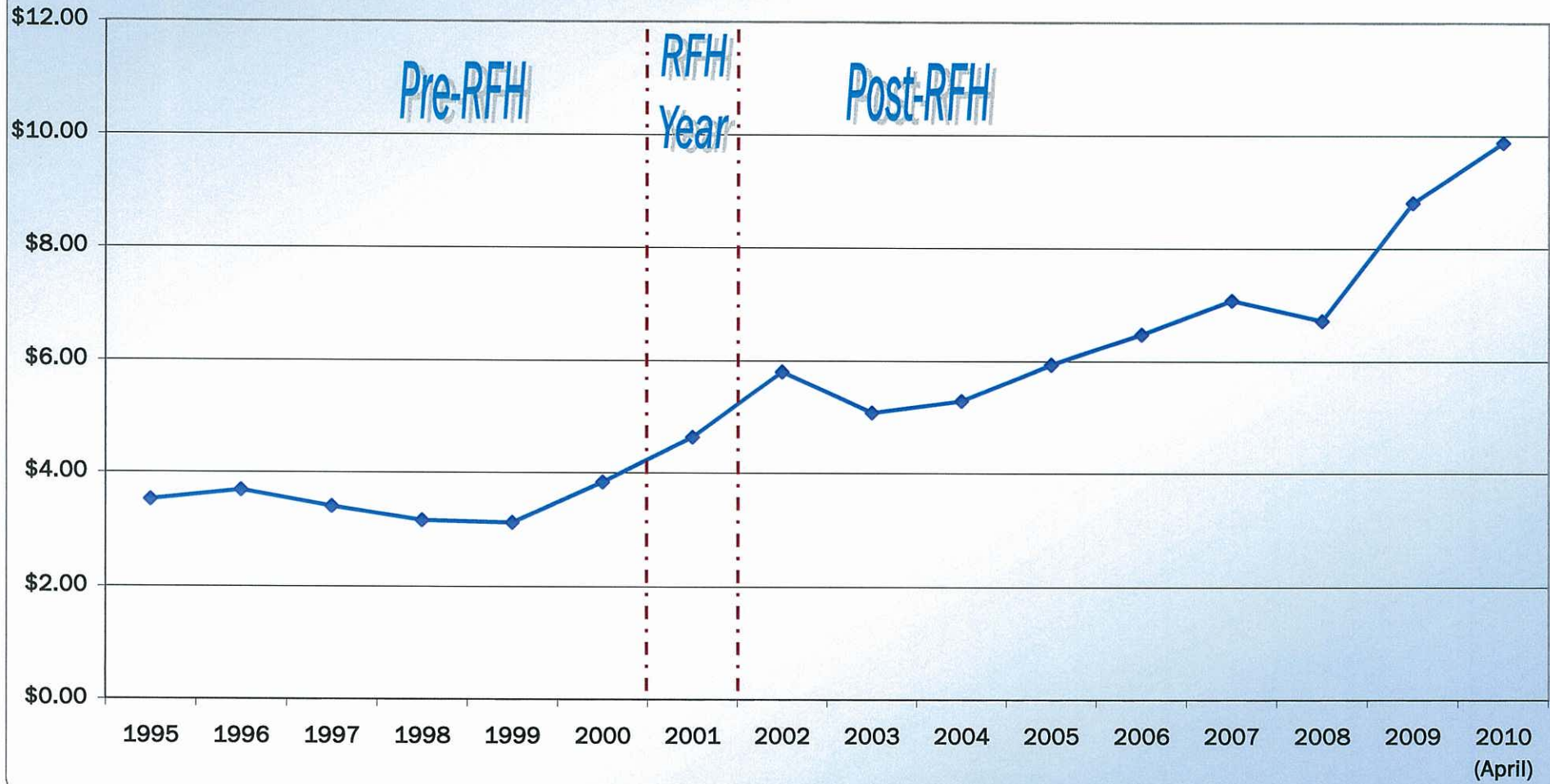
Blue Swimmer Crab



Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)
Mud Crab

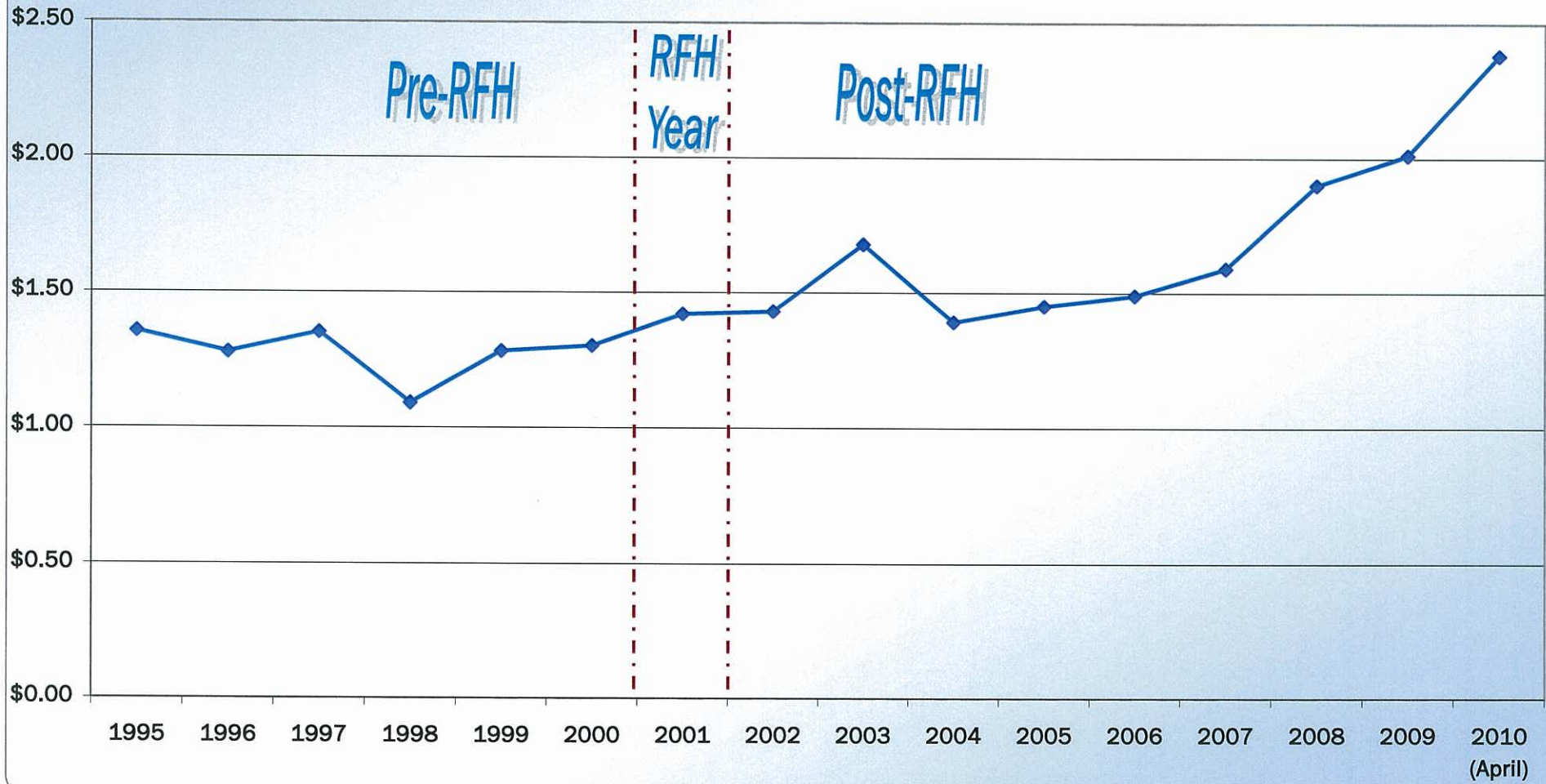


Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)
Dusky Flathead



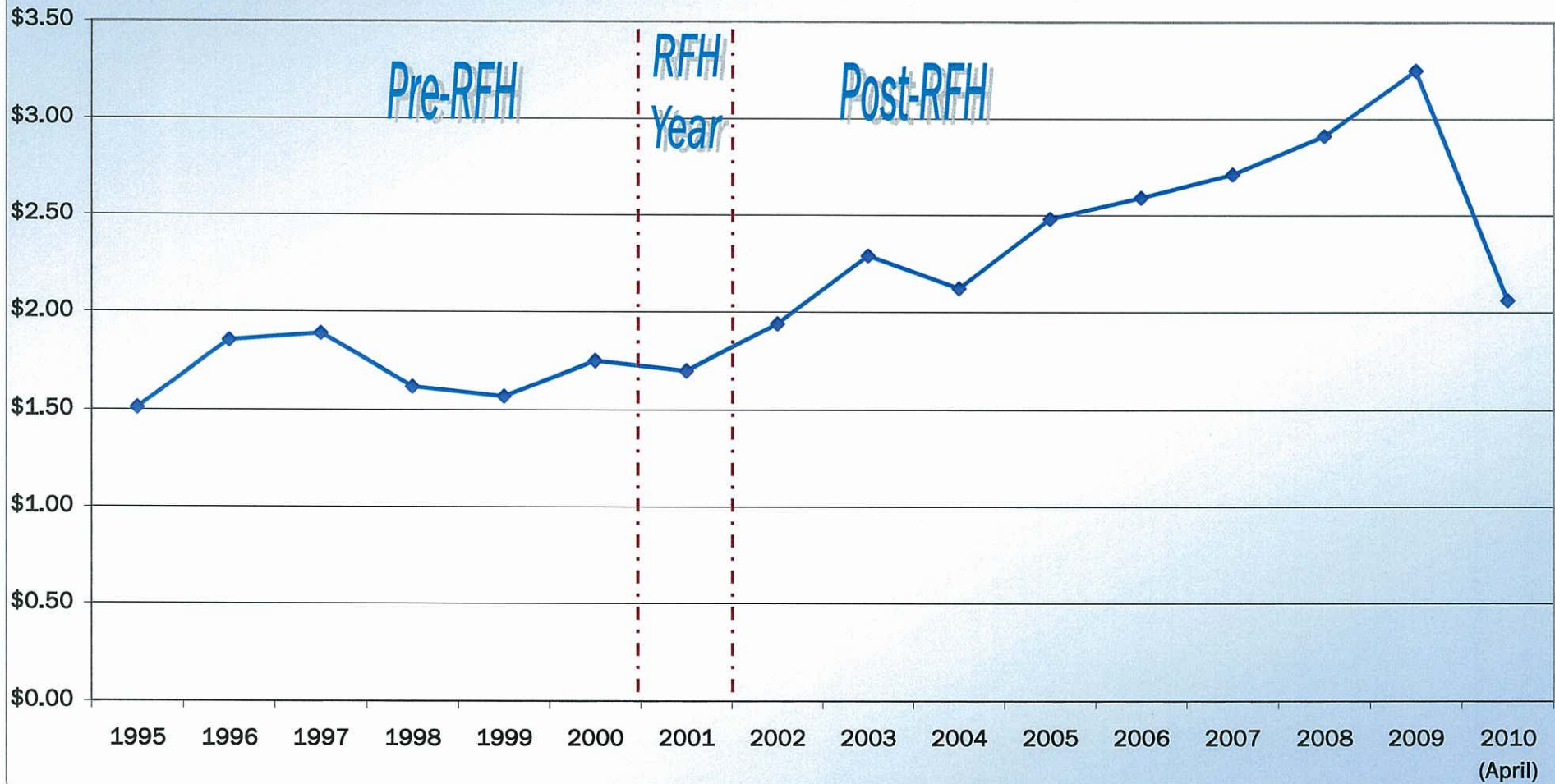
Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

Luderick



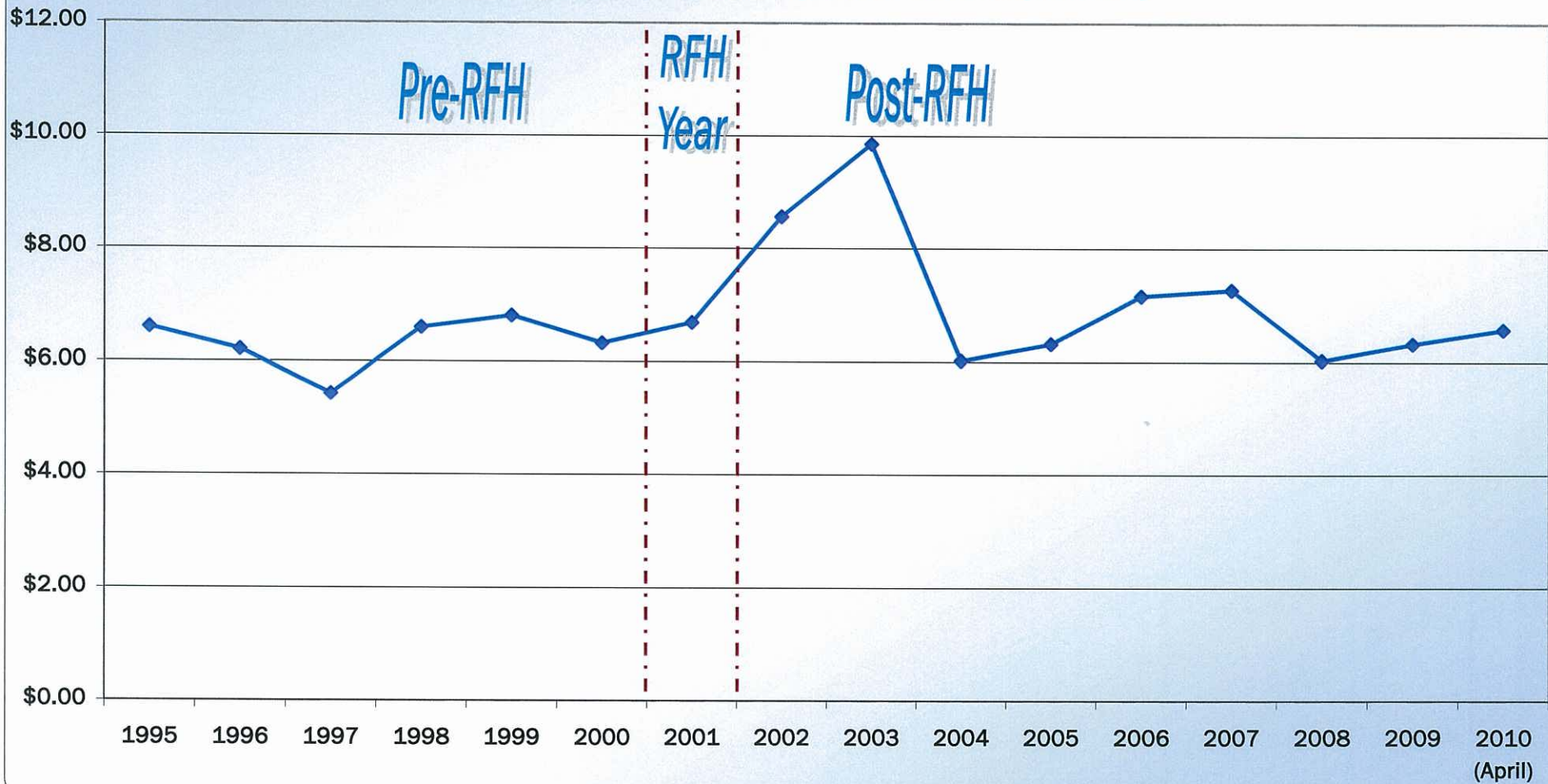
Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

Sea Mullet (excludes sea-run fish)

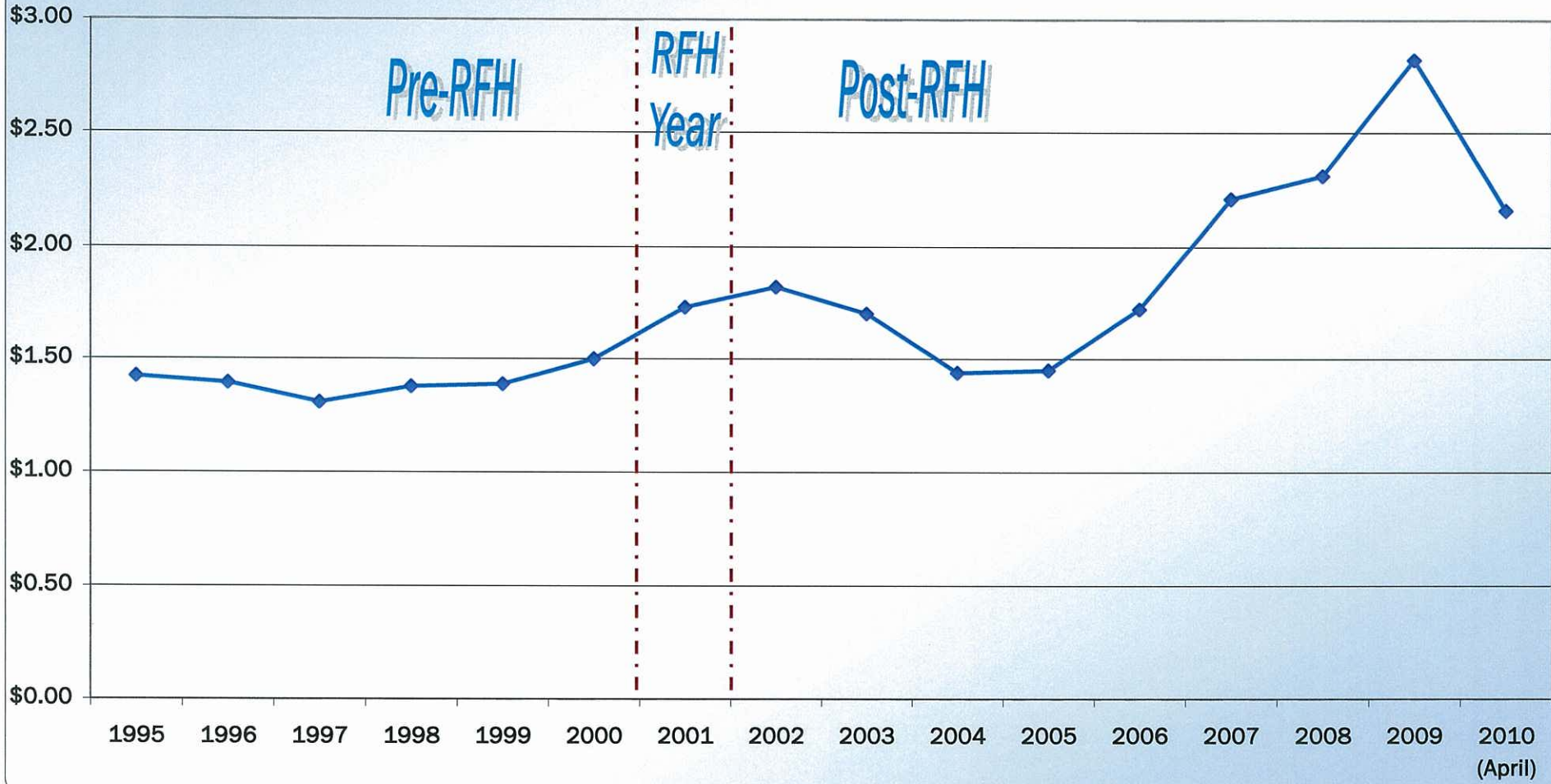


Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)

School Prawn (estuary and sea captured)



Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)
Yellowtail Scad



Sydney Fish Market Auction Price of NSW Supplied Estuary Harvested Seafood
(Top 10 by Quantity)
Sand Whiting

