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**Maternal and nutritional factors affecting larval
competency in the spiny lobster,**

Jasus edwardsii.

By

Gregory George Smith

B.App.Sc (Hons)

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

University of Tasmania

Launceston, Australia

February 2004

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Abstract

The major impediment to closing the life-cycle of *Jasus edwardsii* Hutton (Decapoda: Palinuridae), a spiny lobster being assessed as a candidate for aquaculture, lies with larval rearing. Larval development in *J. edwardsii* phyllosoma is a complex and protracted phase taking in excess of 300 days in captivity. Often the initial phyllosoma competency (survival and growth) is poor and thought to be associated with parental influences. To improve survival in culture a method to assess larval competency at hatch was determined and environmental, physiological and nutritional influences on competency assessed.

The development of an activity test to assess larval competence involved short-term exposure of phyllosoma larvae to temperature and salinity stresses, responses monitored (stress indices) and later correlated with survival in starvation tests and in culture. The initial activity test (1 h in 23°C at 10‰) was refined (1 h in 21°C at 10‰) during an examination of nutritional influence on larval competency allowing the most competent larvae to be selected for culture, a significant advantage for any potential aquaculture species.

The effect of exposing broodstock to elevated temperatures (17 and 19°C) during embryonic development was assessed in relation to the larval competence of newly-hatched phyllosoma. Elevated temperature provided out-of-season larvae by accelerating embryonic development by up to 2 months however; the larvae produced were smaller and less competent than those incubated under ambient conditions (9.5-13°C). This was a significant finding as it ended the use of this technique to provide out-of-season phyllosoma larvae and stimulated research into alternate methods to provide phyllosoma at different times during the year.

Larval competence was also assessed in relation to broodstock physiology. Larger females produced larger phyllosoma, which demonstrated a greater potential for survival in culture, ascertained by stress indices and LD-50. Viable fecundity (phyllosoma number at hatch) in captivity was \approx 45% of that expected from fisheries estimates and may indicate a reduction in fecundity associated with captivity, an area identified as requiring further dedicated studies. Size at onset of maturity was correlated with morphometric changes to male leg length and female abdominal segment width, providing non-destructive correlates for determining maturity in both males and non-ovigerous females.

The ability of juvenile *Artemia*, the predominant food source of cultured *J. edwardsii* phyllosoma larvae, to assimilate a range of enrichment products was assessed. The nutritional factors targeted were those credited with improving larval competency in crustaceans and included lipids and the development of a protocol for enrichment with ascorbic acid (AA). These live feed studies demonstrated that both lipid and AA (particulate form) are assimilated by juvenile *Artemia* (at >1% of *Artemia* dw for AA) concomitant with enrichment concentrations, and maintained with short-term starvation. The lipid assimilation ability of juvenile *Artemia* was

examined in relation to the loss of gut content, a common occurrence during the external mastication process of *J. edwardsii* larval feeding. Gut content did not make a significant contribution to total *Artemia* profiles shortly after the cessation of enrichment meaning any subsequent loss that may occur during feeding would not significantly alter *Artemia* nutritional profiles. It is considered that juvenile *Artemia*, like smaller metanauplii are powerful a tool for the delivery of specialized enrichment products.

Dietary influences on the maternal lipid and fatty acid digestive gland (storage), ovary (maturation) and tail muscle profiles were examined during starvation and ovarian maturation and their roles examined in relation to the production of competent larvae. The digestive gland lipid content was high ($\approx 70\%$ dw) and dominated by triacylglycerol (energy source); it showed evidence of utilization during starvation but not during ovarian maturation. The digestive gland fatty acid profile resembled that of the diet, a fact that could be used to identify preferred wild lobster diets, i.e., through the use of dietary lipid signatures. A potential method to ascertain a range of beneficial nutritional products that may assist larval competence in wild caught larvae. The ovary and tail muscle were resilient to dietary changes in lipid or fatty acid profile, with the tail muscle approximating that of newly-hatched phyllosoma. This study demonstrated that *J. edwardsii* are effective in obtaining their lipid requirements in spite of minimal dietary input and reduces the emphasis on lipids and fatty acids in the nutrition of *J. edwardsii* broodstock.

A study to ascertain the benefit of supplementary AA during broodstock maturation found that ovarian AA concentration was easily saturated, and in the absence of supplementation was sequestered from the tail muscle, the first time this has been considered as a significant AA store. There was minimal AA utilization during embryonic development, no improvement to broodstock fecundity or phyllosoma competency suggesting that there are no reproductive or larval competency benefits to providing supplementary AA to broodstock. In contrast, the delivery of mega-doses of AA to newly-hatched phyllosoma via juvenile *Artemia* resulted in large increases to larval AA content ($161 - 2250 \mu\text{g g}^{-1}$) and concomitant increases in larval survival (74%). This is the first time *Artemia* enrichment protocols have resulted in an improvement to larval survival.

This thesis has identified factors which contribute to the production of competent phyllosoma larvae; a dietary mix of live and pellet feed is sufficient to supply the lipid and AA requirements of broodstock, large females producing large eggs and phyllosoma should be targeted as broodstock, while incubation should be conducted under conditions of ambient temperature. The development of an activity test is an effective tool that provides a quick and easy determination of larval competency at hatch, capable of enhancement by feeding with juvenile *Artemia* supplemented with a particulate form of AA. Adoption of these procedures should ensure the most competent larvae are available to improve the success of phyllosoma larval rearing in the spiny lobster *J. edwardsii*.

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Table of contents

DECLARATION AND AUTHORITY OF ACCESS	I
ABSTRACT.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF TABLES	XI
LIST OF FIGURES	XIV
LIST OF PLATES	XVIII
1. CHAPTER ONE - GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION.	3
1.2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY	4
1.2.1. Larval competency.....	4
1.2.2. Environmental and physiological influences on larval competency.....	5
1.2.3. Enrichment protocols for phyllosoma live feeds.....	6
1.2.4. Nutritional influences on larval competency	6
1.3. NOTES ON THIS STUDY	7
1.4. REFERENCES	8
2. CHAPTER TWO - LOBSTER COMPETENCY	11
2.1. ABSTRACT	13
2.2. INTRODUCTION	14
2.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	16
2.3.1. Broodstock collection and holding	16
2.3.2. Morphological measures.....	17
2.3.3. Larval rearing.....	17
2.3.4. Cumulative activity test.....	18
2.3.5. Quantification of fatty acids.....	19
2.4. STATISTICAL ANALYSES	20
2.5. RESULTS	20
2.5.1. Size of phyllosoma at hatch and during culture.....	20
2.5.2. Survival of larvae.....	21

2.5.3.	<i>Cumulative activity test</i>	24
2.5.4.	<i>Phyllosoma fatty acid profiles</i>	26
2.6.	DISCUSSION	27
2.6.1.	<i>Size of phyllosoma at hatch and during culture</i>	27
2.6.2.	<i>Survival of ongrown larvae</i>	27
2.6.3.	<i>Cumulative activity test</i>	29
2.6.4.	<i>Fatty acids</i>	29
2.7.	CONCLUSION	30
2.8.	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	31
2.9.	REFERENCES	31
3.	CHAPTER THREE - BROODSTOCK CHARACTERISTICS	34
3.1.	ABSTRACT	36
3.2.	INTRODUCTION	37
3.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	38
3.3.1.	<i>Broodstock collection and holding</i>	38
3.3.2.	<i>Size at onset of maturity</i>	39
3.3.3.	<i>Broodstock morphological measures</i>	41
3.3.4.	<i>Collection and counting of viable phyllosoma</i>	41
3.3.5.	<i>Phyllosoma viability and morphological measures</i>	42
3.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	42
3.5.	RESULTS	43
3.5.1.	<i>Lobster morphometrics</i>	43
3.5.2.	<i>Hatch, viable fecundity and phyllosoma treatments</i>	48
3.6.	DISCUSSION	50
3.7.	CONCLUSION	53
3.8.	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	53
3.9.	REFERENCES	54
4.	CHAPTER FOUR - PHYLLOSOMA DIET (A)	57
4.1.	ABSTRACT	59
4.2.	INTRODUCTION	60
4.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	61
4.3.1.	<i>Artemia ongrowing</i>	61
4.3.2.	<i>Gut evacuation trial</i>	62
4.3.3.	<i>24 h Artemia enrichment experiment</i>	62
4.3.4.	<i>Lipid class and fatty acid analysis</i>	63
4.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	65
4.5.	RESULTS	65

4.5.1.	<i>Gut evacuation of Artemia with inert plastic beads</i>	65
4.5.2.	<i>Juvenile Artemia - lipid class and fatty acid composition</i>	66
4.5.3.	<i>Artemia size</i>	68
4.5.4.	<i>Dietary lipid and fatty acid composition</i>	68
4.5.5.	<i>Enriched Artemia - lipid and fatty acid composition</i>	73
4.6.	DISCUSSION	77
4.6.1.	<i>Gut evacuation trial</i>	77
4.6.2.	<i>Juvenile Artemia - lipid and fatty acid composition</i>	77
4.6.3.	<i>Artemia enrichment experiment - lipid and fatty acid composition</i>	78
4.7.	CONCLUSION	81
4.8.	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	82
4.9.	REFERENCES	83
5.	CHAPTER FIVE - PHYLLOSOMA DIET (B)	86
5.1.	ABSTRACT	88
5.2.	INTRODUCTION	89
5.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	91
5.3.1.	<i>Artemia production</i>	91
5.3.2.	<i>Experiment 1: Ascorbic acid dose rate</i>	92
5.3.3.	<i>Experiment 2: Ascorbic acid assimilation and depletion</i>	92
5.3.4.	<i>Ascorbic acid analysis</i>	93
5.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	94
5.5.	RESULTS	95
5.5.1.	<i>Ascorbic acid dose rate</i>	95
5.5.2.	<i>Ascorbic acid uptake and maintenance</i>	96
5.6.	DISCUSSION	99
5.7.	CONCLUSIONS.....	102
5.8.	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	102
5.9.	REFERENCES	103
6.	CHAPTER SIX - BROODSTOCK SUPPLEMENT (A) - LIPIDS	106
6.1.	ABSTRACT	108
6.2.	INTRODUCTION	109
6.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	110
6.3.1.	<i>Broodstock collection and holding</i>	110
6.3.2.	<i>Broodstock dietary regime</i>	111
6.3.3.	<i>Broodstock sampling and monitoring to phyllosoma hatch</i>	112
6.3.4.	<i>Phyllosoma assessments</i>	113
6.3.5.	<i>Morphological measures</i>	114

6.3.6.	<i>Larval rearing</i>	114
6.3.7.	<i>Cumulative activity test</i>	115
6.3.8.	<i>Quantification of lipids and fatty acids</i>	115
6.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	116
6.5.	RESULTS	117
6.5.1.	<i>Dietary lipid and fatty acid profiles</i>	117
6.5.2.	<i>Broodstock physiological changes</i>	119
6.5.3.	<i>Phyllosoma physiological characteristics</i>	121
6.5.4.	<i>Broodstock lipid and fatty acid profiles</i>	124
6.5.5.	<i>Phyllosoma lipid and fatty acid profiles</i>	133
6.6.	DISCUSSION	135
6.6.1.	<i>Dietary influence on lipid storage and reproductive development</i>	135
6.6.2.	<i>Broodstock lipid and fatty acid storage and use</i>	136
6.6.3.	<i>Phyllosoma lipid and fatty acid profiles</i>	137
6.6.4.	<i>Phyllosoma physiological parameters</i>	138
6.7.	CONCLUSION	139
6.8.	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	139
6.9.	REFERENCES	140
7.	CHAPTER SEVEN - BROODSTOCK SUPPLEMENT (B) – ASCORBIC ACID..	144
7.1.	ABSTRACT	146
7.2.	INTRODUCTION	147
7.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	149
7.3.1.	<i>Broodstock collection and holding</i>	149
7.3.2.	<i>Broodstock dietary regime</i>	149
7.3.3.	<i>Preparation of AA enriched Artemia pellets</i>	150
7.3.4.	<i>Broodstock sampling and monitoring</i>	151
7.3.5.	<i>Phyllosoma collection and treatments</i>	152
7.3.6.	<i>Ascorbic acid analysis</i>	153
7.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	153
7.5.	RESULTS	154
7.5.1.	<i>Broodstock diet leaching</i>	154
7.5.2.	<i>Broodstock organ concentrations</i>	155
7.5.3.	<i>Egg and phyllosoma concentrations</i>	158
7.5.4.	<i>Fecundity, egg and phyllosoma size/survival</i>	161
7.6.	DISCUSSION	162
7.6.1.	<i>Broodstock diet leaching</i>	162
7.6.2.	<i>Broodstock organ concentrations</i>	162
7.6.3.	<i>Egg and phyllosoma concentrations</i>	164

7.6.4.	<i>Fecundity phyllosoma size and survival</i>	164
7.7.	CONCLUSION	166
7.8.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	166
7.9.	REFERENCES	166
8.	CHAPTER EIGHT - PHYLLOSOMA SUPPLEMENT – ASCORBIC ACID.....	169
8.1.	ABSTRACT	171
8.2.	INTRODUCTION	172
8.3.	MATERIALS AND METHODS	173
8.3.1.	<i>Artemia production and experimental treatments</i>	173
8.3.2.	<i>Morphological measures</i>	175
8.3.3.	<i>Activity test</i>	175
8.3.4.	<i>Larval rearing</i>	175
8.3.5.	<i>Ascorbic acid analysis</i>	176
8.4.	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	177
8.5.	RESULTS	177
8.5.1.	<i>Phyllosoma growth and survival</i>	177
8.5.2.	<i>Phyllosoma AA concentration</i>	179
8.5.3.	<i>Phyllosoma stress indices</i>	180
8.6.	DISCUSSION	183
8.7.	CONCLUSION	185
8.8.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	185
8.9.	REFERENCES	186
9.	CHAPTER NINE - GENERAL DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY	189
9.1.	GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	191
9.1.1.	<i>Activity tests</i>	191
9.1.2.	<i>Environmental parameters</i>	192
9.1.3.	<i>Physiological parameters</i>	193
9.1.4.	<i>Properties of larval food source</i>	194
9.1.5.	<i>Nutritional parameters</i>	196
9.2.	SUMMARY	197
9.3.	REFERENCES	198

List of tables

Table 2.1	The regression values for a linear fit of survival of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma to Stage IV against developmental Stage.....	23
Table 2.2	The correlation between activity levels of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma subjected to different combinations of temperature and salinity against survival for unfed 14 d old phyllosoma and 42 d old fed phyllosoma (Stage IV).....	24
Table 2.3	Major fatty acids (mg g ⁻¹ dw) in newly-hatched <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma from wild and captive broodstock sources incubated at different temperatures.	26
Table 3.1	Minimum and maximum measurements of the spiny lobster <i>J. edwardsii</i>	43
Table 3.2	Significant correlates (r) of parameters associated with viable fecundity (the number of phyllosoma produced), egg and phyllosoma characteristics.	49
Table 4.1	Lipid class composition (percentage of total lipids), lipid content (wet weight) and percentage composition of major (>2%) and essential fatty acids in juvenile <i>Artemia</i> (1.5mm long). At time 0 h freshly prepared and lyophilized samples were analyzed. Lyophilized <i>Artemia</i> samples were used thereafter at 3 h and 6 h, during forced gut evacuation with beads (w/beads) or starvation without beads (w/o beads). Data are presented as mean \pm s.d.; n = 2.	67
Table 4.2	Lipid class composition (percentage of total lipids) and lipid content (mg g ⁻¹) of enrichments and <i>Artemia</i> at Day 1 and Day 4, after 24 h enrichment (Day 2 and Day 5, respectively), and further 6h starvation. Newly-hatched spiny lobster phyllosoma profiles (target predator species) are included for comparison (Smith, 1999). Data are presented as mean \pm s.d. (n = 3, except for starved 6 h, n = 6).	69
Table 4.3	Percentage composition of major (>2%) and essential fatty acids in OWL enrichment, <i>Artemia</i> at Day 1 and Day 4, after 24 h enrichment with OWL (Day 2 and Day 5, respectively) and 6h starvation. Newly-hatched spiny lobster phyllosoma profiles (target predator) are included for comparison (Smith 1999). Data are presented as mean \pm s.d. (n = 3, except for starved 6 h, where n = 6). Enrichment composition: OWL - oat bran: wheat germ: lecithin (50:6:4).	70
Table 4.4	Percentage composition of major (>2%) and essential fatty acids in OWL+OIL enrichment, <i>Artemia</i> at Day 1 and Day 4, after 24 h enrichment with OWL+ OIL (Day 2 and Day 5, respectively) and 6h starvation. Newly-hatched spiny lobster phyllosoma profiles (target predator species) are included for comparison (Smith 1999). Data are presented as mean \pm s.d. (n = 3, except for starved 6 h, where n = 6). Enrichment composition: OWL+OIL - oat bran: wheat germ: lecithin: oil (50:6:4:40). Oil composed of Max EPA: ARASCO - 4.5:1.	71
Table 4.5	Percentage composition of major (>2%) and essential fatty acids in A1 DHA Selco enrichment, <i>Artemia</i> at Day 1 and Day 4, after 24 h enrichment with A1 DHA Selco (Day 2 and Day 5, respectively) and 6h starvation. Newly- hatched spiny lobster phyllosoma profiles (target predator) are included for comparison (Smith 1999). Data are presented as	

mean \pm s.d. ($n = 3$, except for starved 6 h, where $n = 6$). Enrichment composition: A1 DHA Selco (INVE Group, Belgium).....	72
Table 5.1 Ascorbic acid enrichment and starvation protocols for <i>Artemia</i> nauplii and juveniles, Exp2.	92
Table 6.1 Quantitative fatty acid profiles of dietary ingredients and calculated combined diets fed to broodstock. Diet SP consisted of squid: pellet (4:1) and Diet BP beefheart: pellet (4:1). Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).	118
Table 6.2 The ovarian stage of development of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> broodstock, determined macroscopically according to Fielder (1964), during periodic sampling.....	119
Table 6.3 The correlation between activity levels of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma subjected to different combinations of temperature and salinity against phyllosoma survival in an starvation LD-50 and animals cultured to Stage IV (42 d old fed phyllosoma).	124
Table 6.4 Lipid profiles and weight of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> digestive gland, ovary and tail muscle at the commencement of the study (Pre-starve), after starvation for 3 weeks (Post-starve) and refeeding for 1, 3 and 5 months (just prior to the ovigerous moult). Animals were fed Diet SP (squid: pellet, 4:1) or Diet BP (beefheart: pellet, 4:1) to satiation. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).	126
Table 6.5 Quantitative fatty acid composition of female <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> digestive gland at the commencement of the study (Pre-starve), after starvation for 3 weeks (Post-starve) and refeeding for 1, 3 and 5 months (just prior to the ovigerous moult). Animals were fed Diet SP (squid: pellet, 4:1) or Diet BP (beefheart: pellet, 4:1) to satiation. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).	127
Table 6.6 Quantitative fatty acid composition of female <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> ovary at the commencement of the study (Pre-starve), after starvation for 3 weeks (Post-starve) and refeeding for 1, 3 and 5 months (just prior to the ovigerous moult). Animals were fed Diet SP (squid: pellet, 4:1) or Diet BP (beefheart: pellet, 4:1) to satiation. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).	131
Table 6.7 Quantitative fatty acid composition of female <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> tail muscle at the commencement of the study (Pre-starve), after starvation for 3 weeks (Post-starve) and refeeding for 1, 3 and 5 months (just prior to the ovigerous moult). Animals were fed Diet SP (squid: pellet, 4:1) or Diet BP (beefheart: pellet, 4:1) to satiation. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).	132
Table 6.8 Qualitative and quantitative lipid and fatty acid profiles of newly-hatched phyllosoma from broodstock either fed Diet SP consisting of squid: pellet (4:1) (Phyllo SP) or Diet BP consisting of beefheart: pellet (4:1) (Phyllo BP), or from wild phyllosoma (Wild Phyllo) sourced from wild ovigerous females. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n=3$).....	134
Table 7.1 Ascorbic acid (AA) content in <i>Artemia</i> enriched alginate pellets immersed in seawater, AA is presented both quantitatively (\pm sem) and as a % loss, $n = 3$. B – Basal diet; fresh mussels, squid and penaeid compound diet (2:2:1dw), BA _{low} – Basal diet + unenriched <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets (A _{low}), BA _{high} – Basal diet + <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets enriched with AA (A _{high}), BA _{med} – Basal diet + mix of A _{low} and A _{high} <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets.	154

Table 7. 2	Distribution of ascorbic acid (AA) in the organ (digestive gland, ovary) /tail muscle pool of <i>J. edwardsii</i> females before and after feeding an ascorbic acid supplemented diet for 10 weeks (See Table 1. for details) Data was analysed using ANOVA, $P < 0.05$ was considered significant. B – Basal diet; fresh mussels, squid and penaeid compound diet (2:2:1dw), BA _{low} – Basal diet + unenriched <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets (A _{low}), BA _{high} - Basal diet + <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets enriched with AA (A _{high}), BA _{med} – Basal diet + mix of A _{low} and A _{high} <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets.	156
Table 7.3	<i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma quality measures of stress indices, size (total length, mm) and survival (%) after supplementation of broodstock diets with AA. No significant difference was noted across any quality parameter. B – Basal diet; fresh mussels, squid and penaeid compound diet (2:2:1dw), BA _{low} – Basal diet + unenriched <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets (A _{low}), BA _{high} - Basal diet + <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets enriched with AA (A _{high}), BA _{med} – Basal diet + mix of A _{low} and A _{high} <i>Artemia</i> -alginate pellets.	161

List of figures

Fig. 2.1 The total length at Stages I to IV of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma from different broodstock sources (wild and captive) and embryonic incubation histories (21°C, 17°C and ambient). Data are presented as mean \pm sem. Different superscripts denote a significant difference between groups (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 5$ for all groups with the exception of Stage IV ambient captive, $n = 4$.	21
Fig. 2.2 Survival of unfed 14 d old <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma from different broodstock sources (wild and captive) and incubation histories (21°C, 17°C and ambient). Data are presented as mean \pm sem. Different letters denote a significant difference between groups (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 5$.	22
Fig. 2.3 Survival to Stage IV of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma derived from different broodstock sources (wild and captive) and incubation histories (21°C, 17°C and ambient). Data are presented as mean \pm sem. Different letters denote a significant difference between groups (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 5$ for all groups with the exception of Stage IV ambient captive, where $n = 4$.	23
Fig. 2.4 Activity test measuring the number of prostrate newly-hatched <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma not responding to light stimuli at 3 min intervals for a total of 1 h when subject to different combinations of temperature (18°C, 23°C and 28°C) and salinity (10, 15, 35, 55 and 60‰). Phyllosoma were from different broodstock sources (wild and captive) and incubation histories (21°C, 17°C and ambient). Data are presented as mean \pm sem. Different letters denote a significant difference between groups (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 5$ for all groups.	25
Fig. 3.1 Map of east coast of Tasmania showing the source of animals used in this study.	40
Fig. 3.2 The relationship between carapace length (mm) of male ($n = 116$) and female ($n = 122$) <i>J. edwardsii</i> and wet weight (g).	44
Fig. 3.3 The relationship between carapace length (mm) of male ($n = 116$) and female ($n = 122$) <i>J. edwardsii</i> and total length (mm).	44
Fig. 3.4 The relationship between carapace length (mm) of male ($n = 116$) and female ($n = 122$) <i>J. edwardsii</i> and the length of the (a) 1 st and (b) 2 nd abdominal segment (mm).	45
Fig. 3.5 The relationship between carapace length (mm) of male ($n = 116$) and female ($n = 122$) <i>J. edwardsii</i> and the width of the (a) 1 st and (b) 2 nd abdominal segments (mm).	46
Fig. 3.6 The relationship between carapace length (mm) of male ($n = 116$) and female ($n = 122$) <i>J. edwardsii</i> and the length of the (a) 2 nd and (b) 3 rd walking legs (mm).	47
Fig. 3.7 The relationship between the carapace length (mm) of female <i>J. edwardsii</i> and the number of eggs (fecundity) as described by Hickman (1945), Kennedy (1993; unpublished Tasmanian fisheries data) or the number of phyllosoma (viable fecundity) noted in this study. Viable fecundity was from wild and captive ovigerous females from Bicheno held in captivity until hatch ($n = 30$).	49

Fig. 4.1 Within a few minutes of suspending 20-30 μm plastic beads in the water column, they are visible within the gut cavity of <i>Artemia</i> due to continuous mechanism of filtration and ingestion.....	66
Fig. 4.2. Changes in the quantitative contribution of arachidonic (AA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to the total lipid in Day 1 <i>Artemia</i> , after 24 h enrichment (Day 2) and a further 6 h starvation. Different superscripts denote significant differences within a dietary treatment over time.....	75
Fig. 4.3. Changes in the quantitative contribution of arachidonic (AA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to the total lipid in Day 4 <i>Artemia</i> , after 24 h enrichment (Day 5) and a further 6 h starvation. Different superscripts denote significant differences within a dietary treatment over time.....	76
Fig. 5.1 Uptake and conversion of graduated amounts of ascorbyl 2-phosphate (A2P) g L^{-1} to L-ascorbic acid (AA, $\mu\text{g g}^{-1} \text{dw}$) by 1.5 mm juvenile <i>Artemia</i> . Different letters denote a significant difference between <i>Artemia</i> AA concentrations (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 3$	95
Fig. 5.2 The uptake and conversion efficiency (%) of ascorbyl 2-phosphate (A2P) to L-ascorbic acid (AA) by 1.5 mm juvenile <i>Artemia</i> after 24 h enrichment. Different letters denote a significant difference between AA efficiencies (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 3$	96
Fig. 5.3 Uptake, conversion and maintenance of ascorbyl 2-phosphate (A2P) to L-ascorbic acid (AA) during 6 and 24 h enrichment at 28°C , and 6 and 24 h starvation at 18 and 28°C . Two <i>Artemia</i> size class were examined, (a) 1.0 mm, 2 day old instar II/III nauplii and (b) 2.5 mm, 8 day old juveniles. Different letters denote a significant difference in AA retention post enrichment between 18 and 28°C at either 6 or 24 h within size class (two-way ANOVA, $P < 0.05$), $n = 3$	98
Fig. 6.1 The change in the organ lipid index (organ lipid weight/total body weight $\times 100$) of female <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> fed either Diet SP (Broodstock SP) or Diet BP (Broodstock BP) for 5 months. Diets SP and Diet BP consisted of squid: pellet, 4:1 or beefheart: pellet, 4:1, respectively. Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n = 3$).	120
Fig. 6.2 The change in the gonadal somatic index (GSI, ovary weight/total body weight $\times 100$) of female <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> broodstock after feeding for 5 months. Animals were fed either Diet SP (Broodstock SP) or Diet BP (Broodstock BP) (see Fig. 6.1 for details). Data are presented as mean \pm sem ($n = 3$). Different superscripts denote a significant difference between dietary phyllosoma groups within a moult stage.	121
Fig. 6.3 Cross-sectional diameter of eggs and total length of Stages I to IV <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma from different broodstock dietary regimes and Wild Phyllosoma (see Fig. 6.1 for details). Data are presented as mean \pm sem. For all samples $n = 3$, except Phyllosoma SP and Wild Phyllosoma where $n = 6$ and Phyllosoma BP where $n = 9$. Different superscripts denote a significant difference between dietary phyllosoma groups within a moult stage.	122
Fig. 6.4 Survival of <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> phyllosoma to Stage IV derived from broodstock fed Diets SP, BP and wild phyllosoma (see Fig. 6.1 for details). Data are presented as mean \pm sem for Phyllosoma SP and Wild Phyllosoma where $n = 6$ and Phyllosoma BP where $n = 9$. Different superscripts denote a significant difference between dietary phyllosoma groups within a moult stage.	122

- Fig. 6.5 Activity test measuring the number of newly-hatched *Jasus edwardsii* phyllosoma inactive and not responding to light stimuli at 3 min intervals for a total of 1 h (“stress index”) when subject to different combinations of temperature (21, 23 and 25°C) and salinity (8, 10 and 12‰). Phyllosoma resulted from broodstock fed different dietary regimes and reference phyllosoma (see Fig. 6.1 for details). Data are presented as mean \pm sem for phyllosoma SP and wild phyllosoma where n=6 and phyllosoma BP where n=9. Different superscripts denote a significant difference between dietary phyllosoma groups at hatch...123
- Fig. 6.6. The major fatty acids (%) in the (a) digestive gland, (b) ovary and (c) tail muscle of *Jasus edwardsii* broodstock prior to feeding (Pre-starve) and after feeding Diet SP or Diet BP (see Fig. 1 for details) for 5 months (T-5). Diet and phyllosoma data are included for comparison. Phyllosoma resulting from broodstock fed Diet SP and BP are indicated by Phyllo SP and Phyllo BP, respectively. Wild Phyllosoma (Wild Phyllo) were sourced from wild-caught ovigerous females. For all samples n=3, except Phyllo SP and Wild Phyllo where n=6 and Phyllo BP where n=9.128
- Fig. 7.1 Tissue concentrations of ascorbic acid (AA $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$ dw) prior to and after feeding supplementary AA for 10 weeks. All treatments included basal (B) fresh and compound prawn diet and were supplemented with *Artemia* pellets (comprising unenriched and/or AA-enriched *Artemia*) to provide dietary AA concentrations of 150 (BA_{low}), 450 (BA_{med}) or 1350 (BA_{high}) $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$. Different letters denote a significant difference between tissue concentrations of AA (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$). Each treatment was examined in triplicate.....157
- Fig. 7.2 Change in total ascorbic acid (μg) in the digestive gland, ovary and tail muscle of *Jasus edwardsii* relative to the content at Time 0 (baseline of plot). All treatments included basal (B) fresh and compound prawn diet and were supplemented with *Artemia* pellets (comprising unenriched and/or AA-enriched *Artemia*) to provide dietary AA concentrations of 150 (BA_{low}), 450 (BA_{med}) or 1350 (BA_{high}) $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$. Each treatment was examined in triplicate.....158
- Fig. 7.3 Egg and phyllosoma ascorbic acid (AA) concentrations resulting from different amounts of broodstock AA supplementation. All treatments included basal (B) fresh and compound prawn diet and were supplemented with *Artemia* pellets (comprising unenriched and/or AA-enriched *Artemia*) to provide dietary AA concentrations of 150 (BA_{low}), 450 (BA_{med}) or 1350 (BA_{high}) $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$. Different letters denote a significant difference between treatments in eggs or phyllosoma (ANOVA, $P < 0.05$). Each treatment was examined in triplicate.159
- Fig. 7.4 The relationship between (a) dietary ascorbic acid (AA) and egg or phyllosoma AA, and (b) dietary AA after 1 h immersion in seawater and egg or phyllosoma AA concentrations. All treatments included basal (B) fresh and compound prawn diet and were supplemented with *Artemia* pellets (comprising unenriched and/or AA-enriched *Artemia*) to provide dietary AA concentrations of 150 (BA_{low}), 450 (BA_{med}) or 1350 (BA_{high}) $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$. Regression analysis determined the significance of relationships with analysis of covariance used to determine differences between the slopes and intercepts of the lines. Four replicates were examined for egg or phyllosoma dietary concentration.160
- Fig. 7.5 The relationship between relative viable fecundity (total number of phyllosoma produced adjusted for female size) and broodstock dietary treatment. All treatments included basal (B) fresh and compound prawn diet and were supplemented with *Artemia* pellets (comprising unenriched and/or AA-enriched *Artemia*) to provide dietary AA concentrations of 150 (BA_{low}), 450 (BA_{med}) or 1350 (BA_{high}) $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$, n = 6 per treatment....161

-
- Fig. 8.1 The total length (mm) of *Jasus edwardsii* phyllosoma at Stages II and III. Phyllosoma were fed unenriched *Artemia*, *Artemia* supplemented with algae or with ascorbyl-2-polyphosphate (A2P). Plain or algal-enriched *Artemia* were fed continuously for 28 days in two treatments during the study. While 4 other treatments received A2P-enriched *Artemia* on a progressive basis starting from the commencement of the trial (D-0), the 3rd (D-3), 6th (D-6) or 9th (D-9) day of Stage I (14 days) and II (14 days). Different letters denote a significant difference between phyllosoma length (n=20 larvae) within a Stage (ANOVA, $P<0.05$). 178
- Fig. 8.2 The survival (%) of *Jasus edwardsii* phyllosoma. For feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. Different letters denote a significant difference between survival within a Stage, n = 3 culture vessels. 178
- Fig. 8.3 Ascorbic acid levels (AA, $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$ dw) in phyllosoma at Stages I, II and III. For the phyllosoma feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. Sampling for phyllosoma AA levels during Stage I was conducted at hatch. Different letters denote a significant difference between phyllosoma survival (n=3 culture vessels) within a Stage (ANOVA, $P<0.05$). 179
- Fig. 8.4 Regression analysis of phyllosoma survival at Stage III and ascorbic acid levels (AA, $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$ dw) (n=15 phyllosoma groups). For the phyllosoma feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. 180
- Fig. 8.5 Stress indices at hatch (Day 0) and during culture at Stage I (Days 3, 6 and 9), Stage II (Day 14) and Stage III (Day 28). For the phyllosoma feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. On Days 3 – 9, those feed treatments not shown were yet to commence feeding with ascorbyl-2-phosphate (A2P) enriched *Artemia*, so were equivalent to the plain treatment. Different letters denote a significant difference between phyllosoma survival within a Stage (ANOVA, $P<0.05$). Samples were in triplicate with each replicate consisting of 20 phyllosoma n=3. 181
- Fig. 8.6 Regression analysis of phyllosoma stress index at Stage III and ascorbic acid levels (AA, $\mu\text{g g}^{-1}$ dw) (n=15 phyllosoma groups). For the phyllosoma feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. 182
- Fig. 8.7 Correlation analysis of survival (%) and stress index at Stage III (n=15 phyllosoma groups). For the phyllosoma feed regime, see Fig. 8.1. 182
-

List of Plates

- Plate 1. Developmental stages in the spiny lobster *Jasus edwardsii*, (1) broodstock, (2) egg bundles beneath ovigerous females, (3) eggs just prior to hatch, (4) newly-hatched naupliosoma, (5) Stage I phyllosoma larvae, (6) Stage VIII phyllosoma..... 2
- Plate 2. Development of an activity test for assessing larval competency in *Jasus edwardsii*. (1) Initial test phase incorporating 5 salinities contained within 200 ml sample pots (in triplicate) and 3 temperatures contained in separate water baths. (2) A close-up of the sample pots in one water bath. (3) The latest version of the activity test apparatus, incorporating backlit lighting to assist in the detection of phyllosoma movement. (4) A total of 20 phyllosoma were placed within each sample pot. (5) Stage I phyllosoma larvae on the bottom of a sample pot. (6) A close-up of a Stage I phyllosoma..... 12
- Plate 3. Physical measures of *Jasus edwardsii* spiny lobsters - (1) total wet weight (ww), (2) leg length, (3) carapace length (CL), (4) abdominal segment width. A range of lobster sizes were used in fecundity measures (5) in this photo animals ranged from smallest at 107mm CL, 600 g ww; medium at 120mm CL, 900 g ww and the largest measuring 152mm CL, 1800 g ww. (6) Small precocious ovigerous female measuring 58 mm CL, 103 g ww..... 35
- Plate 4. *Artemia* gut ingestion and evacuation study using plastic beads. (1) Instar I *Artemia* nauplii. (2) An *Artemia* hatching vessel. (3) The *Artemia* culture facility at the Tasmanian Aquaculture & Fisheries Institute, Marine Research Laboratories showing enrichment cones on the left-hand side and grow-out tanks in the centre. (4) *Artemia* biomass being harvested. (5) Experimental 3 L *Artemia* enrichment vessels. (6) Gut evacuation of juvenile *Artemia* using 20-40 µm plastic beads, note the beads in the gut cavity as well as in the water around the *Artemia*..... 58
- Plate 5. Enrichment of *Artemia* with a particulate form of ascorbic acid (ascorbyl-2-monophosphate; A2P). (1) Ongrowing *Artemia* to the desired size in culture vessels. (2) Particulate ascorbic acid; A2P. (3) Harvesting ongrown *Artemia* for enrichment. (4) Enrichment of *Artemia* with A2P. (5) Juvenile *Artemia* after 24 h enrichment with A2P. 87
- Plate 6. Experimental system and dietary components used in the broodstock lipid study. (1) Broodstock tanks. (2) Lobsters in hides. (3) Squid dietary component. (4) Beefheart dietary component. (5) Penaeid compound dietary component (pellet)..... 107
- Plate 7. Manufacture of ascorbic acid pellets and the broodstock experimental system. (1) 12% Alginate. (2) *Artemia* biomass. (3) Alginate and *Artemia* mix (1:1) extruded through a 60 mm syringe into a 4% CaCl solution. (4) Extruded mix cut into 1 cm long pellets. (5) *Artemia* pellets prepared ready for use. (6) Broodstock tanks used during the 10-week broodstock ascorbic acid supplementation study. 144

- Plate 8. Ascorbic acid enrichment of phyllosoma larvae of the spiny lobster *Jasus edwardsii* using ascorbyl-2-monophosphate (A2P). (1) Culture system used to raise phyllosoma larvae; 1 L glass beakers initially stocked at 200 Stage I larvae L⁻¹ fed with 3 *Artemia* ml⁻¹ and treated with antibiotics (20 ppm oxytetracycline) during the daily 100% water exchange. (2, 3, 4) *Artemia* often are impaled upon spines of the phyllosomas periopods before being brought towards the oral region where shredding action of the maxillipeds (5,6) allows consumption of the food particles..... 170
- Plate 9. A range of factors found to influence larval competency in the spiny lobster *J. edwardsii*. (1) Large broodstock produce larger more competent larvae. (2) Embryonic development should not be conducted at elevated temperatures. (3, 4, 5) A mixture of fresh and pellet products provide the range of lipids, fatty acids and ascorbic acid required for initial larval competency. (6) Activity tests are a good method to choose the most competent larvae for culture. (7) The provision of supplementary levels of ascorbic acid to newly-hatched phyllosoma through first feeds improves larval survival and growth..... 190