

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

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Our ref D26-133738/002



The Hon Meg Brown MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Government Administration B
sandflathead@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Brown *Meg*

I am writing in relation to your letter of 2 July 2026, addressed to both Dr David Midson and me, requesting additional information in relation to your Committee's inquiry into matters relating to the closure of the sand flathead fishery in south-east Tasmania.

- 1. Can you please provide the Committee with the decision brief relevant to closure of the sand flathead fishery in south-east Tasmania? In the relevant decision brief that came up, were there options provided or a single closure recommendation? (see pp. 6 and 15 of the hearing transcript)***

In relation to the decision brief, I table the following documents to the Committee:

- Attachment 1 - Ministerial Minute signed 11 December 2025, seeking approval of recommended management action.
- Attachment 2 - Ministerial Minute signed 24 February 2026, seeking approval of preferred mechanism through which to implement recommended management action.
- Attachment 3 - Departmental Minute signed 25 February 2026, where the General Manager (Marine Resources) made the determination and effect to the instruments to close the south-east sand flathead fishery and implement landing requirements statewide, noting that the General Manager (Marine Resources) was also the person making the recommendations in the previous briefs and used this information in making his decision.

You will note that, as resolved during the committee hearing, some information has been removed from these documents where the information is confidential. This includes personal information of persons, information obtained in confidence, information relating to enforcement of the law, along with other confidential information.

I also have included an advice letter from the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), dated 1 March 2023 (refer to Attachment 4). This letter provides important context, in terms of the management options considered following the first 'Depleted' assessment for sand flathead. Importantly, it demonstrates the limited remaining options available to support stock recovery in the south-east fishery. The information contained in this advice letter continues to contribute to briefings and discussions between IMAS and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, with fisheries managers considering multiple options to achieve sustainability outcomes prior to making recommendations.

2. Can you please provide the Committee with the relevant Departmental stakeholder engagement or communication plan or strategy targeting non-compliance relating to the sand flathead fishery in south-east Tasmania?

The Department's communication strategy in regard to compliance and sand flathead is multifaceted. This is because compliance of recreational fishers can be voluntary or coerced, and individuals exist on a spectrum from full compliance through to opportunistic or intentional offending.

1. Addressing intentional non-compliance

This aspect of the strategy included strong messaging from the Minister and Department about compliance. I draw your attention to page 36 of the Department's submission to the Committee:

"In 2023, the Department's published report on consultation of the proposed rules noted that "other management measures, such as partial or full fishery closures, may be implemented if recovery of the stock under these settings is not satisfactory"."

Following the commencement of new scalefish rules from 1 November 2023, the Department supported Tasmania Police to deliver boosted services for the implementation of new management arrangements. This supported an enhanced compliance presence over the 2023-24 fishing season, with a particular focus on compliance with the new sand flathead rules in the south-east. I also reiterate that in November 2024, amidst concerns about high levels of non-compliance with new Sand flathead rules, in the Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Guide 2024-25 the then Minister said:

"I will consider the effectiveness of compliance checks over the coming summer and determine whether more direct measures to safeguard stocks are necessary. These may include requiring all flathead species caught in the southeast to be landed unfilleted, or potentially the full closure of the sand flathead fishery in this region until there is evidence of stock recovery."

The then Minister's media release¹ on 15 October 2024 also flagged compliance issues:

"Unfortunately, Tasmania Police checks last summer reported significant compliance issues, particularly in the southeast, where stocks are most depleted."

There are challenges in influencing intentional non-compliance through communications and engagement alone. The Department, supported by Tasmania Police advice, therefore considers altering management settings to reduce the opportunity for intentional non-compliance, particularly where reforms have minimal impact on compliant fishing activity. In whole, this aims to support compliance with the rules.

2. Increasing voluntary compliance

Most of the Department's communication strategy has been focused on increasing voluntary compliance, as it targets the majority of fishers, is more cost efficient for enforcement activities and normalises compliant behaviour. It focuses on voluntary compliance of the rules via engagement and stewardship, to help support stock recovery.

As I said during the hearing, in the pyramid of compliance activities, the first premise is about education and making people aware of the rules, and it would be a punitive approach to communication for the Department to explicitly threaten the recreational fishing community

¹<https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/latest-news/2024/october/improving-recreational-sea-fishing-for-all-tasmanians>

with closing a fishery due to non-compliance. This would also likely be counterproductive to the Department's efforts for progressing voluntary compliance and stewardship and run the risk of normalising non-compliant behaviours.

Our voluntary compliance strategy and activities aim to:

- encourage a reduction in illegal catches through increasing awareness and understanding of the rules;
- encourage a reduction in legal catches through fishers choosing to target other sustainable species; and
- reduce incidental mortality by teaching fishers how to catch and handle fish responsibly.

The Department has been enacting this strategy through face to face, digital and product engagement. I draw your attention to the Sand Flathead Communications and Engagement Overview 2012-2026 (refer to Attachment 5), which was provided to the Committee in the Department's submission to the inquiry through a website link. This document provides a summary of communications and community engagement activities directly or tangentially related to the sand flathead fishery from 2012 to March 2026.

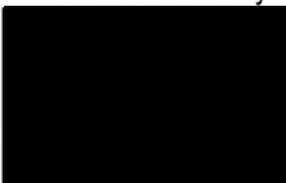
Of note is that between July 2025 and April 2026, we had more than 9,500 face to face interactions with recreational fishers and the public; and in 2024-25 financial year we had more than 39,480 face to face interactions. Underpinning these efforts is the understanding that fishers who are accurately informed and appropriately engaged are more receptive to messages about legal and responsible fishing, and therefore able to change their behaviours to follow the rules and ensure higher survival of released sand flathead.

Attached is a high-level document outlining the Government's approach to communicating issues related to management of the sand flathead stock, with specific regard to the closure (refer to Attachment 6). This document has been used to guide sand flathead-related engagement and communications. It demonstrates what the Department considers when communicating fisheries-related rules for the sand flathead fishery.

You will note that some information within this document has also been removed where that information is confidential.

While many of these items have been delivered, delivery of some items was impacted by rule changes, resourcing and competing Government priorities. Notwithstanding this, the overarching objective of improving voluntary compliance remained a key focus. Our engagement metrics demonstrate the significant efforts undertaken by the Department to promote and improve voluntary compliance in relation to sand flathead.

Yours sincerely



Jason Jacobi
SECRETARY

20 July 2026

Attachments

- 1 Ministerial Minute – 11 December 2025
- 2 Ministerial Minute – 24 February 2026
- 3 Departmental Minute – 25 February 2026
- 4 IMAS advice letter – 1 March 2023
- 5 Sand Flathead Communications and Engagement Overview 2012-2026
- 6 Sand Flathead Recovery Plan Communications Strategy

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania



Critical Date: URGENT
Ministerial No:
NRE File No: IMIN25/472

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

MINISTER:
DATE: 11 / 12 / 2025

Minute to the Minister for Primary Industries and Water

**SUBJECT: STOCK STATUS AND FUTURE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
TO EXPEDITE SAND FLATHEAD RECOVERY**

Minister's notation:

Purpose:

[REDACTED]

To seek your approval to release the Sand Flathead Stock Rebuilding Plan (Rebuilding Plan) together with the previously committed \$1.2 million for a stock enhancement program.

Recommendations:

That you:

1. NOTE that the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) recently released its 2025 Southern Sand Flathead Stock Assessment report outlining that Sand Flathead stock remains depleted (Attachment 1).
2. NOTE that IMAS recently released (through Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC)) a feasibility study into Sand Flathead Stock Enhancement (Attachment 2).
3. NOTE that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) has been working on the Sand Flathead Stock Rebuilding Plan (Rebuilding Plan) that coordinates stock recovery activities across multiple agencies (NRE Tas, IMAS, the Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing (TARFish), and Tasmania Police (Tas Pol), [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Attachment 3).
4. NOTE that the State 2024-25 State Budget allocated \$1.2 million over four years for a Stock Enhancement program.
5. APPROVE the Stock Enhancement program, to be undertaken by IMAS through a research agreement with NRE Tas, using captive bred and translocated stock from Furneaux Group/ Flinders Island that will be released into the D'Entrecasteaux Channel (DEC) (Attachments 4 [REDACTED]).
6. APPROVE NRE Tas progressing management measures (NRE Tas Recommended) including:
 - a catch-and-release only fishery in the south-eastern zone to support stock enhancement and recovery in that zone as soon as possible; and
 - a requirement for landing Flathead whole (heads and frames) in all Tasmanian waters.
7. APPROVE announcement of the incoming management measures (Attachment 6).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Summary:

- Sand Flathead is Tasmania's most important recreational fish species. However, the recently released Southern Sand Flathead stock assessment for 2025 shows that its stock status remains 'Depleted'.
- Findings from the 2025 report show that the south-eastern zone is the most depleted stock due to high fishing pressure and a large population of fishers.

- Fishing pressure over recent decades has resulted in considerable changes to population size and age structure, particularly in more highly fished waters. There are few large fish left in heavily affected areas, such as the south-eastern zone. This is also a compounding issue that will delay stock rebuilding in some areas. Larger, faster-growing, more robust animals are caught at a disproportionately greater rate than slower-growing, smaller animals, as these larger fish are the first to become vulnerable to capture once they exceed the minimum legal size-limit. Anecdotal field observations from fishers support this data - there are lots of small fish but not many big ones. Fisher survey results led by IMAS show that catch and release of undersized fish is higher than in previous years.
- Additionally, during the 2023 Scalefish rules review some management measures initially recommended by NRE Tas Fisheries Managers and IMAS were not progressed after consultation due to concerns with implementation. Instead, there was an initial focus on education of fishers to ensure compliance with the rules, with monitoring of actual compliance by Tas Pol with the support of NRE Tas.
- Continuation of the current Sand Flathead management arrangements alone means recovery will be a very slow process. Noting the recovery rate of Sand Flathead stocks has also been compromised by low compliance rates and rules that have proven difficult to enforce.
- The Tasmanian Government's objective and intent is to recover the fishery as fast as possible in the most populated areas, and to ensure that the fisher experience is maximised.
- A Sand Flathead stock enhancement program is expected to assist stock recovery, and a feasibility study from IMAS has been completed, suggesting encouraging indicators for enhancement success. This is best achieved by captive breeding, but with a relocation of some larger breeders from Flinders Island to contribute to the natural breeding stock in the south-eastern zone providing the best opportunity for stock enhancement success.
- Fishing mortality from targeted fishing within legal limits, non-compliance and post-release mortality will negatively affect the stock recovery and the effectiveness of stock enhancement efforts. However, a closure of the south-eastern zone between Cape Pillar and Whale Head (██████████ Attachment 1) to recreational Sand Flathead fishing would help mitigate this fishing mortality as well as protect the stock enhancement area to recreational Sand Flathead fishing. Non-compliance may still occur, but it is much easier to police.
- Further management measures will be needed for areas outside the south-eastern zone, where fishing pressure also remains too high to rebuild the fishery within a reasonable timeframe. Allowing fishers to land all Flathead species as fillets (without accompanying frames) impedes Tas Pol from differentiating species and measuring fish in a legally enforceable manner. Requiring all Flathead to be landed whole or as fillets with heads and frames intact, statewide, will support enforcement of bag and size limits, creating clear, enforceable rules that best protect the species and will promote the fastest recovery.

- To implement recommended management changes, several timeline options and associated mechanisms are outlined in Attachment 7.
- A draft Communications Plan is attached for your reference ([REDACTED] Attachment 3).
- The *Flathead landing provisions and council consultation public engagement approach* document outlining records of council consultation in 2023 and options for use of fish wastage previously prepared for supporting the then proposed implementation of landing Flathead whole during the 2023 *Fisheries (Scalefish) Rules 2015* review, is also attached for reference (Attachment 10).
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Background:

Sand Flathead remains Tasmania's most important recreational fish species. However, fishing pressure over recent decades has resulted in considerable changes to population size and age structure, particularly in more heavily fished waters.

Previous Stock Assessment and Management Measures

To better understand these changes, IMAS commenced an annual statewide monitoring program in 2012. In 2022, the statewide stock was classified as 'Depleted', denoting a fishery where the population of spawning fish is reduced to a point where the stock may no longer have the capacity to be maintained at its current level. Other indicators of poor performance in the 2022 assessment included an extremely high fishing mortality (compared with natural mortality) and a lack of larger fish, particularly in the heavily fished south-eastern zone.

The 2022-23 recreational fisher survey showed that more than half (57 per cent) of sand Flathead in Tasmania are taken from the South-East region (2023).

The poor state of the fishery triggered significant changes to management settings in 2023. These included region-based size and bag limits for recreational fishers and banning the take of commercial Sand Flathead.

2025 Stock Assessment

The latest Southern Sand Flathead stock assessment (the Southern Sand Flathead Assessment 2025 provided at Attachment 1) reports that the Tasmanian stock remains 'Depleted' – statewide estimates of biomass, spawning potential and fishing mortality remain below critical levels with only negligible improvements in some indicators in some monitoring zones.

Current data reveals only 1 per cent of Flathead sampled in the South-East are of legal size, i.e. between 35-40cm, demonstrating that despite being able to catch a sand Flathead, majority are undersized and need to be released.

All indicators are currently at critically low levels in all regions except Flinders Island. Prolonged and excessive fishing pressure has forced the evolution of smaller and slower growing fish (a 'stunted' population), particularly in the south-eastern zone. Evidence of stunting has been observed in all regions monitored except for Flinders Island. As these genetic changes are typically deeply embedded, it is likely to hinder efforts to rebuild a fishery with a healthy size structure.

Flathead recovery

To recover the fishery in a way that recognises and balances multiple interests and objectives, the need for a comprehensive multi-agency approach was recognised. As such, NRE Tas is working collaboratively with IMAS, TARFish and Tas Police to progress a range of initiatives.

These initiatives include adaptive management measures based on research and monitoring to understand fishery health and rebuilding needs, research to understand the needs and aspirations of fishers, and a range of NRE Tas fisher education and engagement activities.

TARFish in 2024 was provided funding for a fisher-led Sand Flathead stewardship program. Despite the elapse of time, TARFish remains in its planning phase of this program, and without fisher-led stewardship the recovery rate may be negatively impacted. Refer to Attachment 8 for the schedule of agreed services that TARFish have committed to under our grant deed 2024-2027.

Key actions of the draft Rebuild Plan are summarised below.

Rebuild action		Key organisation	Objective
Fisheries management	Commercial rules	NRE Tas	There is no longer a Commercial Sand Flathead Fishery. No take of Sand Flathead for commercial purposes in state waters was implemented in November 2023 to reduce commercial fishing pressure.
	Recreational rules	NRE Tas	Regional management including reduced bag limits and slot size limits were implemented in November 2023 to reduce recreational fishing pressure. Management measures continue to be reviewed in response to new information becoming available.
	Harvest Strategy	NRE Tas	To be co-created with fishers and scientists to meet ecological, social and economic objectives.
	Compliance and enforcement	TasPol	Ongoing efforts to enforce recreational fisheries rules.
Supporting activities	Stock Monitoring and Assessment	IMAS/NRE Tas	Provide up to date and accurate stock status of Sand Flathead to evaluate rebuilding effects. Predict recovery trajectories more accurately, and more effectively evaluate management strategies.
	Research	IMAS/ NRE Tas/TARFish	Provide detailed findings and analysis of the Sand Flathead fishery, from biomass recovery, genetic connectivity, effective engagement, and stewardship initiatives to ecological interactions.
	Stock enhancement	IMAS/NRE Tas	Supplement wild stock with either or both translocation or captive breeding and stocking of genetically faster growing fish.

	Community engagement and awareness	NRE Tas	Government-led activities to: • Raise awareness of Sand Flathead stock depletion, promote responsible fishing behaviours, • encourage diversification of fishing effort to other species, foster community involvement in fisheries management, • improve awareness of and compliance with rules, monitor and evaluate engagement outcomes.
	Fisher stewardship	TARFish	Sector-led stewardship campaign with the following key outcomes: • improve perceived value of Sand Flathead, voluntary reduction in Sand Flathead catch, • improved awareness and application of best practice fish handling and processing of Sand Flathead, • diversification of species targeted, valuing the research and voluntary participation in research (citizen science).

Note – Management Measures including a “closure” and “landing whole” are not represented in the above table.

As part of our work in the Flathead for the Future program, NRE Tas is encouraging the catch of a “mixed bag” to balance fishing pressure more evenly across different marine species. More abundant species, such as mullet, Australian salmon, and mackerel, are better positioned to withstand fishing pressure than depleted species like Sand Flathead.

A \$3.29 million Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) project, *Filling the knowledge gaps to recover Tasmania's favourite recreational fishery – Southern Sand Flathead*, is expected to be completed in 2028. The project represents contemporary fisheries research and management, including novel modelling of a stock predominantly harvested by the recreational sector, a stewardship program to promote voluntary measures that reduce fishing mortality, initiatives to increase awareness and compliance with management measures, and efforts to strengthen the social licence of fisheries management and research. Collectively, these activities will deliver a more integrated assessment and management strategy for Sand Flathead, provide an exemplar for other scalefish fisheries, and enhance the engagement of key stakeholder groups in sustainable fisheries management.

Compliance concerns

Tas Pol continue to have significant concerns surrounding the Recreational Flathead fishing sector – particularly with the high rate of fishers choosing to fillet fish at sea, which impedes compliance.

During April and May 2025, Tas Pol focused statewide compliance efforts on recreational flathead fishing (refer to Tas Pol summary at Attachment 9).

Offence detections for recreational fishing specific to Flathead increased in the past quarter with 39 detections. This represents about 40 per cent of the annual offence detection for Flathead offences. Additionally, of approximately 80 recreational boats that were checked:

- One in four resulted in Flathead offence(s) being detected.

- 75 per cent of Flathead fish retained by fishers had been filleted prior to the inspection rendering compliance ineffective re size and excess take limits due to inability to identify species.
- Numerous fillets checked by marine police were noted as being of questionable size (undersize).
- Only 25 per cent of Flathead retained by fishers were observed to be whole (unfilleted). As mentioned, of the fishers who retained Flathead whole – one in four were detected to have committed fisheries offences.

Tas Pol highlighted that the last point is concerning in the context that it can be assumed the rate of offending would most likely be higher given issues with identifying species of filleted fish (i.e. Tiger Flathead versus Southern Sand Flathead) and determining compliance around sizing of fish taken.

A common theme identified by Tas Pol for persons committing fisheries offences regarding Flathead was that the fisher was unaware of 'new' 35 cm size limit, or the 40 cm oversize limit. This suggests that further communications and engagement around Recreational Sand Flathead Rules is needed, further demonstrating the importance of a fisher-led stewardship program.

Specific to the Southern Sand Flathead Area:

- Of the 10 vessels that had flathead, 90 per cent of the fishers / vessels had already filleted their fish at sea; unable to measure or confirm species of flathead.
- Dubious claims made about catch being tiger flathead in areas where such species are unlikely to be caught.
- About a third of the fillets were considered to have come from undersize sand flathead.
- Only on three occasions were legal size whole sand flat head were observed; all other flathead fish had already been filleted.

Further to the information above, Tas Pol subsequently also advised:

- Enforcement outcomes for areas subject to fish stock sustainability issues would be maximised by implementing a closure.
- The capacity of Tas Pol to enforce size and catch / bag limits would be significantly improved if there was a requirement to land fish whole or with fillets and intact frames.

- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[illegible]

Actions Required to expedite Sand Flathead recovery

Although natural recovery is a slow process, ensuring rules are enforceable will assist in a faster recovery statewide. Our future proposals to address the above concerns are outlined in the following sections.

1. Stock Enhancement

Management, research and engagement initiatives in the Sand Flathead Rebuilding Plan will be complemented by releasing additional fish into the most overfished area of the south-eastern zone. This will be achieved through a stock enhancement program, led by IMAS, and funded through \$1.2 million from the Tasmanian Government Strong Plan initiative.

A recent IMAS-led study on the feasibility of the program has reinforced initial views that effectiveness would be maximised by enhancing poorly performing stocks in the south-eastern zone using faster growing genes from the Furneaux Group. This is proposed to occur in two ways: 1) initially to kickstart stock enhancement larger (400mm+) faster growing fish from the Furneaux Group will be caught and translocated directly into the stock enhancement area (DEC), and 2) followed by releasing captive-bred fish using parents with genetic traits where growth rates and maximum size have not been negatively impacted by fishing.

Considering funding, logistics and other practical constraints, the study proposed an initial focus on the DEC due to the poor state of the fishery, its importance to south-eastern zone fishers and its semi-enclosed nature (which should limit the

emigration of released fish). Here, the larger transferred mature fish will be monitored through a tagging program to understand movement, growth and mortality while captive bred fish are planned to be released in 2026, once the fingerlings (small fish) have been bred and grown to optimal size in a hatchery-based environment at IMAS.

This also provides a great opportunity for our peak body representative, TARFish, to support the stock enhancement program by advocating for protection of the larger translocated fish as breeders contributing to stock recovery and good handling practices for a catch and release fishery, through their proposed fisher-led stewardship program (funded for but not yet commenced).

2. A future 'Catch-and-Release only Sand Flathead Fishery' (Legally a fishery closure)

Closing an area to Sand Flathead recreational fishing is the strongest stance and fastest way to reduce fishing mortality and speed the recovery of Sand Flathead stocks. The south-eastern zone is the region with the poorest stocks and a closure that incorporates the DEC will further promote and improving return on investment of the \$1.2 million investment.

A catch and release only fisheries speaks 'volumes' to the community about the priority of the fishery and the willingness to take action to save the most iconic Tasmania recreational species. This ensures clarity and simplicity for rules given the recent complexity and enforcement burden. It also ensures the Government investment in Stock Enhancement provides value. Without a closure value of the enhancement program would be limited.

[REDACTED]

NRE Tas considered whether landing whole (as below) without a closure would be appropriate. However, without a closure the stock enhancement program would be ineffective and therefore, there would be no genetic recovery of the stock and fish in the south-eastern zone would remain stunted.

There is the potential to commence the closure later. This would mean closing the fishery when the stock from the stock enhancement program are expected to reach the lower size limit. This would be in approximately 2.5 years. Operating this way would require the delay in putting breeding stock into the water as part of the program for the same period. This is because those fish would be susceptible to fishing without the closure.

This approach would result in a slower recover, although it would be expected to eventually reach the same level. Additionally, because breeding stock wouldn't be released immediately, there would be a delay (of approximately 2.5 years) in receiving the first data from IMAS on the success of the genetic spread from the project. This approach will slightly increase the cost of the project.

The delayed approach will not yield any real benefit for recreational fishers, as there

is currently 1% possibility of catching a legally sized Sand Flathead in the south-east zone, so it is, practically, close to a catch-and-release fishery already.

Announcement of a closure, even if it is delayed, is needed now to allow procurement of the stock enhancement program, because without the closure the program would lack effectiveness.

3. Landing provisions

A statewide requirement for all Flathead species to be landed whole, or as fillets with frames is necessary for recovery under any scenario. This was first recommended by NRE Tas Fisheries Managers in 2023 with strong support from IMAS and Tas Pol. This formed part of the 2023 Scalefish Rules review with public consultation and 53 per cent of fishers supported this option, while 34 per cent expressed no support (with a total of 81 per cent of respondents provided a position on this proposal).

Since daily bag limits for Sand and Tiger Flathead have differed since 2023, landing requirements are critical to enable Tas Pol to differentiate species and measure fish in a legally enforceable manner. Without this ability, fishers can catch up to 20 Sand Flathead per day by claiming fillets to be Tiger Flathead. They can also land undersized and oversized Sand Flathead, which is highly incentivised by the narrow slot limit.

It is currently difficult to accumulate sufficient evidence for a conviction, though Tas Pol suggest that non-compliance is common, due to evasive behaviours regularly observed (as outlined in [REDACTED] Attachment 4), like hastily filleting catch at sea which seldom happened prior to the 2023 rule changes. Further information is available in the report from Tas Pol outlining a review of compliance efforts during 'Operation Visible' (Attachment 9). This was a targeted compliance review of recreational Sand Flathead fishing activities.

Refer to Attachment 10 - *Flathead Landing Provisions 2023 - Council Consultation & Public Engagement Approach* which is a summary of council consultation in 2023 demonstrating little concern if this management change was implemented. This document highlights fisher engagement approaches to educate fishers on ways to utilise fish wastage to ensure minimal boat ramp wastage and fisher buy-in to the new rule.

It is recommended that this occurs from 1 March 26 to allow time to engage with Councils and potentially offer support to install waste management infrastructure, and allow time for communication with fishers Statewide. However, it is noted that Tas Pol would prefer an immediate commencement.

If an earlier commencement is determined, implementation and communication will be somewhat compromised. It is not expected that this will mean fishers will not know about the rule, but rather, some may not view the rule with a quick commencement as legitimate, or will not support it. Additionally, NRE Tas will not have time to roll out a full communication strategy in support of it. With these caveats it could be bought forward significantly, but would still require some time to draft the order, have it approved by OPC and for it to reach you for approval or for an alternative mechanism to be implemented such as a closure notice. A quicker implementation also risks concern from local government.

Financial Implications:

Several sources of funding that currently contribute to activities in support of recovery of Sand Flathead outlined below, however, additional funding may be required (refer to budget estimate below).

<u>Current Fund</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>2026/27</u>	<u>2027/28</u>	<u>2028/29</u>
<u>Flathead Recovery (NRE Tas)</u> <u>(Salary, Flathead for the Future</u> <u>mixed bag community engagement</u> <u>campaign)</u>	<u>\$145,000</u>			
<u>Stock Enhancement</u> <u>(Waiting to release funds to IMAS for</u> <u>the proposed stock enhancement</u> <u>program)</u> <u>*For set up costs, genetics etc</u>	<u>\$600,000*</u>	<u>\$600,000*</u>		
<u>FRDC Project: Filling the knowledge</u> <u>gaps to recover Tasmania's favourite</u> <u>recreational fishery -</u> <u>Southern Sand Flathead</u> <u>* to TARFish over 2024-2028 for</u> <u>fisher-led Stewardship program</u>	<u>\$250,000*</u>			
<u>TARfish (Peak body) Grant Deed –</u> <u>dedicated funding for Sand Flathead</u> <u>& Rock Lobster activities</u>	<u>\$125,000</u>	<u>\$100,000</u>		

Budget estimate for 2026-27 – 2027-28 (four years) for implementation and maintenance of actions in the draft Rebuild Plan

<u>Activity</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>2026/27</u>	<u>2027/28</u>	<u>2028/29</u>
<u>ENGAGEMENT</u> <u>Flathead for the Future – Mixed Bag</u> <u>campaign (NRE Tas)</u> <u>Salary, Communications & Engagement,</u> <u>Policy & Management</u>		<u>\$150,000</u>	<u>\$150,000</u>	<u>\$150,000</u>
<u>STOCK ENHANCEMENT EXPANSION</u> <u>Breeding of more fish for ensuring genetic</u> <u>diversity across the SE and expansion on</u> <u>stock enhancement locations.</u>			<u>\$300,000</u>	<u>\$300,000</u>
<u>COMPLIANCE</u> <u>Increase compliance efforts with new</u> <u>rules & target illegal fishing</u> <u>To gather additional statistics on</u> <u>compliance rates</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>		
<u>HARVEST STRATEGY</u> <u>Development</u>		<u>\$50,000</u>		
<u>STOCK MONITORING AND</u> <u>ASSESSMENT</u>				

<u>Expansion and improvements in data collection and modelling (increase the number of sampling sites and evaluation of new stock modelling tool).</u>		<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>
<u>Total Budget</u>				<u>\$1,350,000</u>

Mandy Clarke

ACTING DEPUTY SECRETARY PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND WATER

10 December 2025

Prepared by:	[REDACTED]	Cleared by:	David Midson
Position:	A/Principal Fisheries Management Officer – Recreational Fishing	Position:	General Manager (Marine Resources)
Email:	[REDACTED]	Email:	[REDACTED]
Phone:	[REDACTED]	Phone:	[REDACTED]

Attachments:

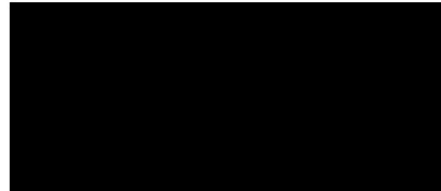
1. Southern Sand Flathead Assessment 2025
2. Stock Enhancement Feasibility Report
3. Sand Flathead Stock Rebuild Plan
4. Stock Enhancement Program outline - one page summary
5. [REDACTED]
6. Media release Key Messages - summary page
7. Mechanism/Timeline to implement recommended management changes
8. Outline of TARFish schedule of agreed services
9. Tas Pol Report from Operation Visible
10. Flathead Landing Provisions 2023 - Council Consultation & Public Engagement Approach
11. [REDACTED]
12. [REDACTED]
13. [REDACTED]
14. [REDACTED]
15. [REDACTED]
16. [REDACTED]
17. [REDACTED]
18. [REDACTED]
19. [REDACTED]
20. [REDACTED]

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania



Critical Date: COB 23 February 2026
Ministerial No:
NRE File No: IMIN26/56

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED



MINISTER:.....

DATE: 24 / 02 / 2026

Minute to the Minister for Primary Industries and Water

**SUBJECT: SAND FLATHEAD RECOVERY – CLOSURE OPTIONS UNDER THE
LIVING MARINE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT 1995**

Minister's notation:

approved - with sect 11 option 3b option 2. rationale document to be retained by dept at this time, standard communications to proceed

Purpose:

To provide you with a summary of the statutory mechanisms that could be used to make management changes regarding sand flathead recovery under the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995*.

Recommendation:

That you:

- 1 NOTE that on 4 February 2026 you announced a policy to make management changes to the sand flathead fishery to establish a closure of the sand flathead fishery in the south-eastern zone and to introduce the requirement that all species of flathead are to be landed whole in all Tasmanian waters from 1 March 2026; and**

- 2 **NOTE that a 'New flathead rules 2026 – Rationale' has been prepared by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) for public release and is attached for your ENDORSEMENT (refer to Attachment 1);**
 - 3 **To implement the management changes please advise of your preferred statutory mechanism option:**
 - (a) **Option 1 – An order under section 49 of the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995* (the Act) (refer to Attachment 2); OR**
 - (b) **Option 2 - A Fishery closure under rule 11 of the *Fisheries (Scalefish) Rules 2015* (the Rules) (refer to Attachments 5 and 6) paired with the necessary exemption instrument issued under section 11 of the Act (refer to Attachment 7); and**
 - 4 **NOTE that a critical date of COB 23 February 2026 has been placed on this Minute to enable the work associated with the preferred option to be undertaken prior to the management changes coming into effect on 1 March 2026.**
-

Summary:

- On 4 February 2026, you announced the following measures to expedite the statewide recovery of the sand flathead fishery:
 - (1) establish a sand flathead fishery closure in the south-eastern zone between Cape Pillar and Whale Head; and
 - (2) require that from 1 March 2026 all flathead species be landed whole (or as fillets with frames intact) in all Tasmanian waters, to ensure species can be identified to assist species-specific size limits and the enforcement of the combined bag limit rule for Sand and Tiger flathead.
- To implement the proposed management changes, two statutory mechanism options have been drafted for your consideration.

Option 1: An order under section 49 of the Act

- Under section 49 of the Act, the Minister, by order published in the *Gazette*, may change a management plan by amending, substituting or adding any provision of the management plan if satisfied that an emergency has arisen, or is likely to arise, making it necessary or advisable to change the management plan. An Order has been drafted, to take effect from 1 March 2026, to progress the management changes (refer to Attachment 2).
- Under section 50 of the Act, before the Minister makes an order, the Minister must consult with the relevant fishing body; and the Secretary, by public notice, must specify the changes that are proposed to be made to a management plan by the order.
- The relevant fishing body therefore needed to be consulted prior to 1 March 2026, the date the Order is proposed to come into effect. Consult under the Act is defined

as “includes to seek information, advice, opinion and representation”. The relevant fishing body representing Tasmanian Recreational fishers is TARFish.

- Consultation means that you must provide TARFish with the opportunity to have comment before you make the Order, but there is no set form for undertaking consultation. This may be email, phone or in person. You fulfilled the requirement to consult with the relevant fishing body on 3 February 2026, via a phone conversation to TARFish.
- The General Manager (Marine Resources) has caused the public notice to be published in newspapers and the *Gazette* on 11 February 2026 as required under section 50 of the Act (refer to Attachment 4).
- TARFish has provided a submission to NRE Tas on the proposed management changes which you should consider prior to you deciding whether or not to make the Order. This submission is provided at Attachment 9.
- This option requires the Order to be tabled in Parliament. It involves a formal parliamentary process including disallowance motions where made. Either House can pass a resolution that the Order be disallowed. The Parliamentary process for progressing an order is outlined in Attachment 3.
- You may now sign the Order but before the date the Order takes effect (1 March 2026). The Order will then need to be tabled in Parliament within 10 sitting days of gazettal.
- An Order under section 49 is in force for a period not exceeding 90 days, however the timeframe may be extended for a further period not exceeding 90 days “if satisfied that there is likely to be a significant risk to living marine resources if the order is not extended” (section 51).

✓ Option 2: A Fishery closure under rule 11 of the Rules with the necessary exemption instrument issued under section 11 of the Act

- To establish a closure of the sand flathead fishery in the south-eastern zone:
 - Under rule 11 of the Rules a closure of the non-commercial Sand Flathead Fishery in the south-eastern zone can be implemented by the Minister or a delegate. NRE Tas’s General Manager, Dr David Midson, has a delegation from you. (Refer to Attachment 5).
- To introduce the requirement that all species of flathead are to be landed whole in all Tasmanian waters:
 - Under rule 11 of the Rules the Minister or a delegate can close the non-commercial scalefish fishery for all species of flathead in respect of the filleting of flathead in State waters. (Refer to Attachment 6.)
 - This may be paired with an exemption instrument granted by the Minister or a delegate. NRE Tas’s Acting Deputy Secretary, Ms Mandy Clarke has a delegation from you to exercise the powers in section 11 of the Act, to exempt all persons fishing for non-commercial purposes in State Waters (non-commercial fishers) and all persons who hold a Commonwealth Authority from this closure (with conditions). (Refer to Attachment 7.)

- The benefits of this option is that it does not rely on an emergency, which was of considerable concern to TARFish, and the process to modify the administrative arrangements is much simpler, therefore where changes are identified through implementation they can be made quickly.
- The changes to flathead possession limits made in October 2024 and regarding transit made in November 2024 were introduced using section 11 of the Act.

-

Background:

Sand flathead is Tasmania's most important recreational fish species. According to the latest fishery stock assessment from the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), sand flathead stock status remains classified as 'Depleted', with the south-eastern zone most impacted due to high fishing pressure and a large population of fishers.

Fishing pressure has resulted in considerable changes to population size and age structure, particularly in the south-eastern zone where very few large fish remain, resulting in the population size structure being described as 'stunted'. Evidence of stunting has been observed in all regions monitored except for Flinders Island. Consequently, natural recovery in the south-eastern zone, without swift and bold management interventions, will be a very slow process, if at all.

Compounding this status, statewide compliance efforts by Tas Pol targeting recreational flathead fishing exposed high rates of non-compliance. Currently, allowing fishers to land all flathead species as fillets (without accompanying frames) impedes Tas Pol from differentiating species and measuring fish in a legally enforceable manner. Although natural recovery is a slow process, ensuring rules are enforceable will also assist in a faster recovery statewide.

Action therefore needs to be taken by the Government now to recover the fishery as fast as possible, in collaboration with activities led by IMAS, Tas Pol and TARFish, through the Government's proposed Sand Flathead Rebuilding Plan (the Rebuild Plan). The draft Rebuild Plan outlines bold management interventions, fisher-led stewardship, research and the implementation of a stock enhancement program in the south-eastern zone.

A stock enhancement program, led by IMAS, and funded through \$1.2 million from the Tasmanian Government Strong Plan initiative, will result in the release of additional fish with faster growing genes into the most overfished area of the south-eastern zone, enhancing poorly performing stocks. Closing an area to sand flathead recreational fishing is the strongest stance and fastest way to reduce fishing mortality and speed the recovery of sand flathead stocks. The south-eastern zone is the region with the poorest stocks and a closure that incorporates the stock enhancement area will further promote and improve the return on investment of the \$1.2 million funding this program.

- To implement the proposed management changes, two statutory mechanism options have been drafted for your consideration.

Consultation on the proposed management changes:

- Rule 6 states that the “Minister must consult with the appropriate advisory committee, established under section 27 of the Act in relation to a fishery referred to in these rules, in respect of any changes relating to” closing a fishery. Section 27 of the Act provides that the Minister may establish advisory committees. No such committee currently exists (though formerly RECFAC would have been such a committee).
- Currently under the NRE Tas Marine Resources’s *Public Engagement and Consultation Policy* the Department consults with the relevant certified fishing bodies, in this case TARFish and Seafood Industry Tasmania (SIT).
- In relation to both statutory mechanism options, on 6 February 2026 the General Manager (Marine Resources) wrote to TARFish and SIT outlining the proposed management changes and providing a consultation period until 19 February 2026. Through this period the General Manager (Marine Resources) provided TARFish and SIT with the basis for his view that urgent management measures were required and an evaluation of compliance and enforcement (refer to Attachment 8).
- SIT did not respond in writing but verbally advised the General Manager (Marine Resources) that the decision does not negatively impact commercial fishers, it supports science-based decision making, and it believes in equality of access to fish stocks for commercial and recreational fishers.
- TARFish has provided a written response that you should consider prior to your determination of the statutory mechanism to implement the management changes. The response is provided at Attachment 9. NRE Tas’s response to the matters raised by TARFish are:
 - **Process** – TARFish states that there was not sufficient consultation prior to [REDACTED] The policy determination was based on advice from NRE Tas which was informed by many years of engagement, specific consultation with TARFish prior to the policy determination was not required. TARFish and all recreational fishers were aware that further management measures had both been recommended in the past by the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) and NRE Tas and would continue to be recommended in both stock assessments and by the department. Additionally, all fishers were aware that the Minister would consider closures as per the advice in the recreational sea fishing guide. Further, prior to the statutory decision being made, TARFish has been provided the opportunity to provide input and have done so.
 - **Emergency Order** – TARFish is of the view that there is no emergency that warrants the use of emergency provisions. NRE Tas remains of the view that the situation with sand flathead, being below 20% spawning biomass, and down to 5% spawning biomass, being under critically unsustainable fishing pressure and the negative biological changes based on that fishing pressure, indicated that in a fisheries management context and emergency has or is likely to arise and as such it is advisable to change the management plan.

- **Disagreement with the Science** – TARFish raised concerns with the characterisation of the IMAS stock assessment, citing work they commissioned by Dr McShane. NRE Tas considers the views of IMAS in the stock assessment to be preferable given the considerable rigor that has gone into the assessment. The assessment is clear, the stock is Depleted, is critically overfished, and without stronger management action recovery will be either unacceptably slow, or not occur at all.
- **Social and Economic Impacts** – TARFish is of the view that social and economic concerns have not been considered. The views of NRE Tas and IMAS are informed by considerable engagement with recreational fishers, including scientific social survey's that show a large majority want quick and decisive management action, including closures. Further TARFish previously raised the economic consequences of the previous reduction of the bag limit to 2. Where there was concern then that the majority of business for boat and tackle stores would be lost. The losses at the current bag limit necessitate the quickest possible recovery to allow reopening to support these businesses. Additionally, NRE Tas will focus on providing information to support people fishing for other species, there are many other fishing opportunities in Tasmania, including in the South East.
- **Mitigations** – TARFish raised the option of a number of modifications or mitigations including business support and engagement activities. NRE Tas would be supportive of the business support (based on assessment of true financial impact by State Growth) and engagement activities, subject to funding being identified. NRE Tas is not supportive of their other modifications.

Financial Implications:

[REDACTED]
NRE Tas continues to work with the Government Media Office on funding of the communications campaign.

Jason Jacobi
SECRETARY

23 February 2026

Prepared by:	[REDACTED]	Cleared by:	David Midson
Position:	AVPrincipal Fisheries Management Officer – Recreational Fishing	Position:	General Manager (Marine Resources)
Email:	[REDACTED]	Email:	[REDACTED]
Phone:	[REDACTED]	Phone:	[REDACTED]

Attachments:

1. Rationale – Sand Flathead Management Changes 2026
2. Order (section 49)
3. Parliamentary process for an order
4. Public notice specifying the changes that are proposed to be made to a management plan by the Order (copy)
5. Closure Notice for sand flathead Fishery – south-eastern Zone
6. Closure Notice filleting flathead in State waters

7. Draft exemption – filleting flathead in State waters
8. Compliance Evaluation
9. TARFish Consultation Submission

Critical Date:
NRE File No: D26-38118

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

SECRETARY:.....
DATE:

Minute to the General Manager

SUBJECT: SAND FLATHEAD FISHERY MANAGEMENT CHANGES – STATUTORY MECHANISMS FOR SIGNING

Secretary's notation:

Purpose:

For you to make the relevant statutory instruments for management changes to help recover the sand flathead fishery under the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995*.

Recommendation:

That you:

1. **APPROVE and SIGN (as delegate of the Minister) the Closure Notice to establish a non-commercial sand flathead fishery closure in the south-eastern zone between Cape Pillar and Whale Head (Attachment 1).**
2. **APPROVE and SIGN (as delegate of the Minister) the Closure Notice to close the scalefish fishery for all species of flathead in respect of the activity of filleting of flathead in State waters (Attachment 2).**

3. **NOTE a draft Instrument of Exemption has been prepared for the Acting Deputy Secretary (as delegate of the Minister) to consider exempting persons from the Closure Notice relating to the filleting of flathead. If the exemption is granted it will have the effect of requiring fishers from 1 March 2026 to land all flathead species whole (or as fillets with frames intact) in all Tasmanian waters. The draft Instrument of Exemption is at Attachment 3.**
-

Summary:

- On 4 February 2026, the Minister announced the following measures to expedite the Statewide recovery of the sand flathead fishery:
 - (1) establish a sand flathead fishery closure in the south-eastern zone between Cape Pillar and Whale Head; and
 - (2) require that from 1 March 2026 all flathead species be landed whole (or as fillets with frames intact) in all Tasmanian waters, to ensure species can be identified to assist species-specific size limits and the enforcement of the combined bag limit rule for Sand and Tiger flathead.
- To implement the proposed management changes, the Minister's preferred option is for fishery closure determinations to be made under rule 11 of the *Fisheries (Scalefish) Rules 2015* (the Rules) (refer to Attachments 1 and 2) paired with an instrument of exemption granted under section 11 of the Act (refer to Attachment 3) to require landing flathead whole or landing flathead with naturally intact frames.
- Both Closure Notices are provided for your approval and signature as delegate of the Minister. A copy of the delegation can be found here: [D23-204388/040 - PEARCE - Fisheries \(Scalefish\) Rules 2015 - positions 20006 702786 702830](#).
- A Closure Notice **comes into effect** when it is published on our website, or if it is also published in the *Gazette* on the date of last publication. Publication of the measures on our website or other should not occur until the Notice has been published.
- An Exemption under s 11 of the Act **commences** when it is signed by the delegate or on a date specified in the Instrument. Publication of the exempt activities can occur when the Instrument **commences**.

A published notice under the Rules means a notice published in one or more of the following ways (see rule 3):

- (a) published in the *Gazette*;
- (b) published on a website operated by, or on behalf of, the Department or Government for the duration of the period for which the notice is in effect;
- (c) published in a newspaper circulating generally in the State;

Background:

To implement the management changes the Minister was provided with the following options seeking his approval for the preferred statutory mechanism:

- (a) Option 1 – An order under section 49 of the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995* (the Act); OR
- (b) Option 2 - A Fishery closure under rule 11 of the *Fisheries (Scalefish) Rules 2015* (the Rules) paired with an appropriate exemption instrument granted under section 11 of the Act

The Minister chose Option 2. Refer to Minute to Minister and relevant attachments at: [IMIN26/56 - PIW \(MR\) - Minute - Sand Flathead Management Changes 2026 - RM Workflow](#)

Consultation on the proposed management changes:

- Rule 6 of the Rules states that the “*Minister must consult with the appropriate advisory committee, established under [section 27](#) of the Act in relation to a fishery referred to in these rules, in respect of any changes relating to*” closing a fishery. Section 27 of the Act provides that the Minister *may* establish advisory committees. No such committee currently exists.
- Currently under the NRE Tas Marine Resources’s *Public Engagement and Consultation Policy* the Department consults with the relevant certified fishing bodies, in this case TARFish and Seafood Industry Tasmania (SIT).
- In relation to both statutory mechanism options, on 6 February 2026 the General Manager (Marine Resources) wrote to TARFish and SIT outlining the proposed management changes and providing a consultation period until 19 February 2026. Through this period the General Manager (Marine Resources) provided TARFish and SIT with the basis for his view that urgent management measures were required and an evaluation of compliance and enforcement.
- SIT did not respond in writing but verbally advised the General Manager (Marine Resources) that the decision does not negatively impact commercial fishers, it supports science-based decision making, and it believes in equality of access to fish stocks for commercial and recreational fishers.
- TARFish provided a written response that was considered prior to the Minister’s determination of the statutory mechanism to implement the management changes.

Financial Implications:

N/A

Prepared by:	██████████	Cleared by:	██████████
Position:		Position:	Wild Fisheries Branch Manager
Email:	████████████████████	Email:	████████████████████
Phone:	██████████	Phone:	██████████

Attachments:

1. Closure Notice for sand flathead Fishery – south-eastern Zone
2. Closure Notice filleting flathead in State waters
3. Draft exemption – filleting flathead in State waters

Workflow extract for Departmental Minute (Attachment 3):

Activity details

Instructions

Add notes

Show all

Activity Instructions:

Review the activity and document/s.

Select Complete & select either Approved or Not Approved.

Select 'Rollback' if further information required

Activity: Approve

Assigned By: [REDACTED]

Assignee: General Manager (Marine Resources) - 702850

Workflow: MINUTE_MR_General Manager_Flathead Management Changes Statutory Instruments_2026

Template: #10 Reviews (Sequential) Approve, Action, Notify

Is Complete: Yes

Final Completion Date: 25/02/2026 at 2:57 PM

Completed By: Midson, David

This activity is complete.

Completed By

Midson, David

Workflow details

MINUTE_MR_General Manager_Flathead Management Changes Statutory Instruments_2026

Date Due: 13/03/2026 at 10:30 AM

Workflow Creator: [REDACTED]

Template: #10 Reviews (Sequential) Approve, Action, Notify

Last Updated By: [REDACTED]

Complete: Yes

1 March 2023

Dr Ian Dutton
General Manager – Marine Resources
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
GPO Box 44
Hobart TAS 7001
Australia

Dear Ian,

I am writing in response to your letter dated 23rd February 2023 requesting scientific advice on a range of management scenarios to aid the recovery of the Sand Flathead (*Platycephalus bassensis*) stocks in Tasmania that were reported as 'depleted' in the Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2020/21 (Fraser et. al., 2022). I have attached the rationale for applying a 'depleted' status to Sand Flathead.

The rationale for assessing the Tasmanian Sand Flathead population as 'depleted' was based on three key factors:

- **Unsustainably high fishing mortality ($> 2 \times$ natural mortality)**
- **Population biomass below critical levels ($< 20\%$)**
- **Spawning potential below sustainable limits (< 0.2)**

These factors are further explained in the attachment.

As such there is an **urgent need to increase the biomass above 20% of the estimated unfished biomass** and then manage the fishery towards a target of at least 40% of unfished biomass.

This species is predominantly harvested by the recreational fishery ($\sim 98\%$) and, as such, economic considerations are different to those that would factor into management of a species with a greater proportion of commercial harvest.

IMAS (and its precursors) have been conducting recreational fishing surveys for over 20 years that clearly show the benefit and values from recreational fisheries relate not only to the harvest of fish for consumption, but also to the quality of the fishing experience. Importantly, a high-quality recreational fishing experience is not just related to the catch, but satisfaction from time spent with friends and family in nature. These factors highlight that a recreationally dominated fishery is likely to have greater resilience to experiencing short term losses of benefits if these losses produce benefits over the long term. It is also known that recreational fishers do not experience high satisfaction levels when fish stocks are in a poor condition.

Therefore, it is suggested that applying a management strategy that aims to recover biomass to at least 40% of unfished levels in the medium term (i.e., 4 - 6 years) rather than longer term (i.e., > 6 years).

A longer-term solution may also exacerbate the recently identified issue of changing growth characteristics in some regions (particularly the south & Georges Bay) which promotes the survival of older fish with slower growth characteristics and smaller maximum sizes (i.e. phenotypic population stunting as a result of fishing-induced evolution). This phenomenon not only risks

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significant impairment of Sand Flathead stock recovery but also risks altering the functioning of the ecosystems this species inhabits.

To recover the biomass to above 20% and above a target of at least 40% **will require a significant reduction in fishing mortality**. We suggest that a significant reduction in catch would rely primarily on reduced bag limits. The multiple model assessment approach applied suggests that **this bag limit would need to be less than two fish per person per day, particularly in southeast Tasmania where stocks are most overfished**. Furthermore, there is a need to provide greater protection for larger, female fish which are now almost absent from most southeast regions in the state, with evidence of phenotypic alterations to the populations as described above.

In your request you have asked for, at point 1, the probabilities of specific scenarios reaching different biomass levels in given time frames. Unfortunately, at this stage, it is not possible to provide this level of detailed quantitative information. Our modelling team are progressing rapidly to advance assessment capacity for Sand Flathead but, at this stage, the models are equilibrium based and do not provide temporal projections.

As such, the advice below is based on best scientific information from the available models, the known biological and ecological traits of the species, and consensus discussions amongst several of our scientists who work on fisheries biology and population dynamics. At this stage however, our advice is based partly on qualitative assessments and provided in line with 'a precautionary approach' to achieve what would be expected to produce a recovery to at least 40% in the medium term (four to six years, as per your letter). The strategy is designed to rapidly see a recovery trajectory that can then be integrated into our models to assess the effectiveness of the strategy. At this point a review period where management changes can be altered based on predictive modeling would be prudent.

It is also important to note that with the rapid development of new models, and as additional data is gathered, that the scientific advice can change.

Advice to the scenarios as presented in point 2 of your letter are outlined below. Further to this it is advised on a holistic strategy for recovery using an ensemble of traditional fisheries management levers, a stewardship, engagement and education program, and a feasibility assessment of re-stocking.

The advice is based on a priority of recovering the stock and secondarily minimising the impact to the fishery based on the assumption that **a rapid recovery will provide greater satisfaction to the values of the recreational sector in the short to medium term**.

A critical component of the strategy is ongoing fishery independent monitoring, ongoing fishery dependent monitoring through frame collection, continuing development of predictive models and periodic review of the effects of management with a precursive intention to relax measures once targets are achieved, or at least the trajectory to recovery can be assessed.

Our general response to your scenarios are:

- **Closing the fishery** – maximises the chances of recovery in a shorter period; however, will impact more on fishers. There would still be a need for significant management change upon reopening of the fishery, such as reduced bag limits and adjusted size limits.
- **Maintaining status quo (i.e., size limit 32 cm, bag limit 20 statewide)** – the biomass will continue to decline and diminish the value of the stock to the recreational sector (i.e., there will be very few fish available for fishers to retain above the size limit). Inaction risks the long-term

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availability of this species. Long-term depletion also creates significant risks to ecosystem health, by impacting the important ecosystem roles of Sand Flathead as predators and prey.

- **Bag limits cut to 4, 5 or 8 depending on region** – Current modelling suggests that the bag limits scenarios of 5 statewide or regional limits of 4 in the south/southeast and 8 in the north will not be sufficient to reduce fishing mortality to allow biomass recovery or continued phenotypic change. It is recommended, however, a bag limit of 5 on the east and north coast in combination with other management measures in our advice below, although there are some local areas of concern such as Georges Bay that a bag limit of 5 may impair local stock biomass recovery.
- **Increasing size minimum size limit to 35 cm** – Modelling suggests that by increasing the minimum size limit (MLS) to 35 cm would protect a significant increase in spawning stock biomass of fast-growing fish, but without a significant reduction in bag limit further phenotypic change is still likely.
- **Maximum size limits of 36 or 40 cm depending on scenario** – A maximum size limit needs to be of a sufficiently low size to provide adequate protection. Current data suggests that a maximum size limit over 40 cm will be grossly ineffective in the south, as most fish are harvested by the fishery before being able to grow to be protected by this measure (see attachment). A maximum size limit of 40 cm, in combination with other significant management measures, will provide some protection to fish of a larger size on the east and north coasts in the immediate term. Importantly, however, maximum size limits will be a critical component of the longer-term recovery and management of the fishery. As a greater proportion of fish grow larger due to other management restrictions, a maximum size limit will be necessary to protect them to avoid repeating the significant absence of larger fish, which is the reason for the current depleted biomass status.
- **Boat limits** – If bag limits are set correctly, boat limits are not required. However, given that modeling suggests that current fishing mortality is greatly above the level required to allow for biomass recovery, a boat limit would provide additional protection and may be worth considering against the strategy of a rapid return to greater than 20% of unfished biomass and a medium-term return to 40% of unfished biomass. The proposed boat limits (three times the bag limit) will only effect boats that take more than 3 fishers, but it is worth noting that this is a common for charter operators.
- **Particular advice for the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, Fredrick Henry Bay and Norfolk Bay** – These three areas are the most impacted by overfishing. The management measures proposed below take these areas into account in the regional stratification.

It will be important that whichever scenario is implemented, that it will require a combination of both catch limits and size limits to be effective.

Current scientific advice suggest the following:

- A level of regionality to the management approach. Two regions on mainland Tasmania be considered and that King Island and the Furneaux group of islands be considered separately.
 - South (Cape Pillar to Whale Head)
 - Rest of mainland Tasmania
 - King Island and the Furneaux Island group
- For the South:

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- a slot limit of 35 – 38 cm, bag limit of 2 boat limit of 6
- For the rest of mainland Tasmania:
 - a slot limit of 35 – 40 cm, bag limit of 5 and boat limit of 15
- For King Island and the Furneaux Island group:
 - a minimum size limit of 40 cm and a bag limit of 5, no boat limit (as a secondary benefit to population protection, this will align with current size limit regulations for blue spot and rock flathead.

It is emphasized the importance of implementing management settings that significantly reduce fishing mortality to contain the risks of continued or permanent decline in stock status, growth characteristics and ecosystem stability.

The stock response will be tracked annually through the annual stock assessment process; however, it is recommended that a formal evaluation should be done after two and four years. During this time IMAS aim to develop a temporally explicit population simulation model to better evaluate and predict the recovery trajectory. Relaxation of measures could then be considered based on the stock recovery trajectory, assessed biomass, and assessed fishing mortality. Conversely, if a recovering trajectory towards 40% is not occurring, further refinements may be needed.

As you are aware, IMAS are currently preparing an FRDC funding application to support the evidence- based management to recover sand flathead populations. This will involve filling biological and ecological knowledge gaps required to inform the assessment models to ensure that decisions can be assessed and adjusted based on the best possible scientific information. It will also include an engagement and communications program (focusing on a collaborative approach between IMAS, DNRET and TARFish) and a feasibility assessment of stock enhancement. We look forward to progressing this application with DNRET and stakeholders in the near future.

I would also be more than happy to discuss with you and or your team the proposals outlined in this response.

Yours Sincerely,



Assoc. Prof. Sean Tracey

On behalf of

Drs Nils Krueck, Klaas Hartmann, Alyssa Marshell and James Haddy

Sand flathead communications and engagement overview

2012-2026

The following provides a summary of communications and community engagement activities directly or tangentially related to the sand flathead fishery from 2012 to March 2026.

Please see caveats relating to this summary at the end of this document.

2026

Media

- *Flathead. Worth the wait* TV and radio advertising.
- Service Tasmania Digital Signage.
- David Midson radio interview (4 February)
- Flathead – it's worth the wait. Media Release.

Print/product engagement

- Mixed bag fishing brochure - 10,000
- Sticker corrections with the new sand flathead rules jetty rulers - 780
 - South-east (English and Mandarin)
 - Statewide (English and Mandarin)
- Sticker corrections for Fish ID signs for closure - 42
- Sticker corrections for Fish ID signs for landing whole - 100
- A4 Corflute signs of new rules for boat ramps and jetties statewide - 450

Digital Engagement

Social media

(As of 24 March)

Sand flathead

- 30 posts/reels across both Facebook and Instagram

- Topics include: responsible handling, new sand flathead rules, frequently asked questions about new rules, frequently asked questions about sand flathead management, Flathead Worth the Wait campaign (including paid advertising)
- Reach: 1,190,298+ (including paid advertising)

Mixed bag

- 10 x mixed bag fishing videos promoting catching, filleting and cooking a range of species.
- 2 x mixed bag fishing text posts.

Videos

- Flathead Worth the Wait
- Mixed bag fishing campaign:
 - Yellowtail Kingfish x 3 (catch, cook, fillet)
 - Leatherjacket x 3 (catch, cook, fillet)
 - Australian salmon x 4 (catch, cook, fillet, why you should bleed and pith fish)
 - Blue mackerel x 3 (catch, cook, fillet)

Web

Updated pages:

- Flathead for the Future
- How you can help sand flathead recover
- Latest sand flathead stock assessment

New pages:

- New rules and research to rebuild Tasmania's sand flathead fishery
- Sand flathead frequently asked questions

App

- Updated content to reflect new flathead rules
- Banner messages to remind fishers of new flathead rules and to update their app

Newsletters

The following newsletters were sent in 2026 which contained information relating to sand flathead:

Recreational fishing newsletters

42K subscribers. 45%-50% open rate.

- 27 Feb 2026 – [Reminder of new flathead rules, answers to FAQs and Mixed Bag Fishing](#)
- 4 Feb 2026 – [Announcement of new flathead rules and what fishers can do to help.](#)

Stockist newsletters

132 subscribers. 50%-51% open rate.

- 27 Feb 2026 – [Reminder of new flathead rules, answers to FAQs, rules poster for print and display and opportunities to work together on Mixed Bag Fishing](#)
- 4 Feb 2026 – [Announcement of new flathead rules and how stockists can help.](#)

Other emails to stakeholders

- Service Tasmania
- Councils
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Parks and Wildlife
- MAST
- Yacht Clubs
- Woodbridge Marine Discovery Centre

Publications

- [Scalefish Managed Species: Sand flathead](#)

2025

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 20,000
- Mixed bag fishing brochure - 5,000
- De-hookers - 2,500
- Agfest displays
 - Mixed bag species signs for:
 - Yellowtail Kingfish
 - Australian salmon

- Longspined sea urchin
- Mackerel
- Wrasse
- Yelloweye mullet
- Leatherjacket
- Mixed bag fishing large corflute sign

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 40 posts/reels posts/reels across both Facebook and Instagram
- Topics: flathead rules, flathead identification, alternative species to catch, flathead research, flathead science, responsible handling, mixed bag fishing
- Reach: 521,290+

Videos

- None

Web

- Minor updates to Flathead for the Future webpages and associated subpages.
- [Mixed bag fishing webpage](#)

App

No flathead related updates.

Newsletters

43,277 - 43,225 subscribers. 46.1% – 51.5% open rate.

Recreational fishing newsletter

22 Jan – [FAD fever, better fishing grants and scallop consultation](#)

- How to identify sand flathead

10 Apr – [Easter update](#)

- Promoting sand flathead tagging program, promoting mackerel as an alternative species to target.

4 July – [Winter fishing update](#)

- Promoting sand flathead tagging program.

16 Oct – [Get your licence](#)

- Promotion of mixed bag fishing and tips for catching different species.

22 Oct – [Recreational Fishing Scalefish Rules Remake](#)

- Invitation to provide feedback on current scalefish rules via survey.

Publications

None.

Face-to-face engagement (Jul 2025 - April 2026)

Summary

Number of in-person engagement activities and number of interactions in 2025-26:

Activity type	Target audiences	Number of activities	Number of direct (face-to-face) interactions
Community liaison patrols (boat ramps and jetties)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • School-aged fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	82	1402
Fishing clinics and schools visits	• School-aged children • Beginner adult fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	24	540
Tackle store visits	• Tackle store staff • Moderate and avid fishers	22	84
Regional events (including NRE-led events)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • General public	5	4358
Updating signage in field	• All fisher types	147	301
Other events (inc NRE-led events)	• All fisher types • General public	11	2896
TOTAL		291 activities	9,581 face-to-face interactions

Signage

Temporary signage was installed prior at over 100 locations statewide to provide clarity on new flathead rules that came into effect on March 1.



2024

Media

- Media Release and Event – Investing in the future of flathead (stock enhancement program)
- Media Release – Improving recreational fishing for all Tasmanians (on-water possession limits for sand flathead).
- ABC Radio interview with Recreational Fisheries Manager (3 May 2024).

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 25,000
- Fish ID signage sticker corrections - 72
- Fish ID sticker - 20,000
- Plastic flexi ruler - 20,000
- What's the Catch brochure - 27,000
- What's the catch media wall (summary of recreational fishing survey results)
- Responsible fishing checklist sticker - 1,000
- Wet handling cloth – Flathead for the Future branded - 200
- Agfest displays
 - Not only fish get caught sign – promoting Fishwatch using sand flathead as an example
 - Responsible sand flathead handling sign
 - Flathead for the Future teardrop banner
 - Sand flathead Road to Recovery sign
 - Sand flathead size limits explained

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 48 posts/reels across both Facebook and Instagram
- Topics: identifying flathead, community engagement, responsible handling, flathead rules
- Reach: 356,500+

Video

None.

Web

- Update to [Recreational Fisheries Research page](#) with latest Recreational Sea Fishing Survey Results, including digital version of What's the Catch brochure and IMAS Angling for Information brochure.
- Update to [Flathead for the Future page](#) notifying of new sand flathead on-water possession limits. Added information about alternative species to target.
- Adding flathead species ID information to all flathead species pages.
- Update to [Sand flathead species page](#) notifying of new sand flathead on-water possession limits.
- Sharing IMAS Sand Flathead Insights brochure.

App

Update with sand flathead on-water possession limits.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

41,311 - 42,540 subscribers. 41.2% - 51% open rate.

22 Mar – [Easter update](#)

- Promoting Australian salmon as an alternative species
- Responsible handling tips for sand flathead and link to Flathead for the Future

19 Apr – [Flathead fisher survey results out now](#)

- Summary of IMAS flathead survey results
- Commercial take myth busting
- Promoting path to sand flathead recovery at Agfest

4 Oct – [Funding for sand flathead stock enhancement](#)

- Funding announcement for stock enhancement program
- Results from recreational sea fishing survey, with sand flathead still the top caught fish

15 Nov – [You're invited! Fishing forums are back!](#)

- Fishing forums in Hobart and Launceston, with flathead as a key topic

29 Nov – [Sand flathead transiting, rock lobster and catch reporting updates](#)

- Change to rules to allow transiting between sand flathead zones

Publications

None.

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2024-2025 FY)

Summary

Number of in-person engagement activities and number of interactions in 2024-25:

Activity type	Target audiences	Number of activities	Number of direct (face-to-face) interactions
Community liaison patrols (boat ramps and jetties)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • School-aged fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	275	4434
Fishing clinics	• School-aged children • Beginner adult fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	38	1012
Tackle store visits	• Tackle store staff • Moderate and avid fishers	21	63
Regional events	• All fisher types • Fishing families	23	33262

(including NRE-led events)	General public		
Other events (inc NRE-led events)	- All fisher types - General public	11	397
TOTAL		371 activities	39,488 face-to-face interactions

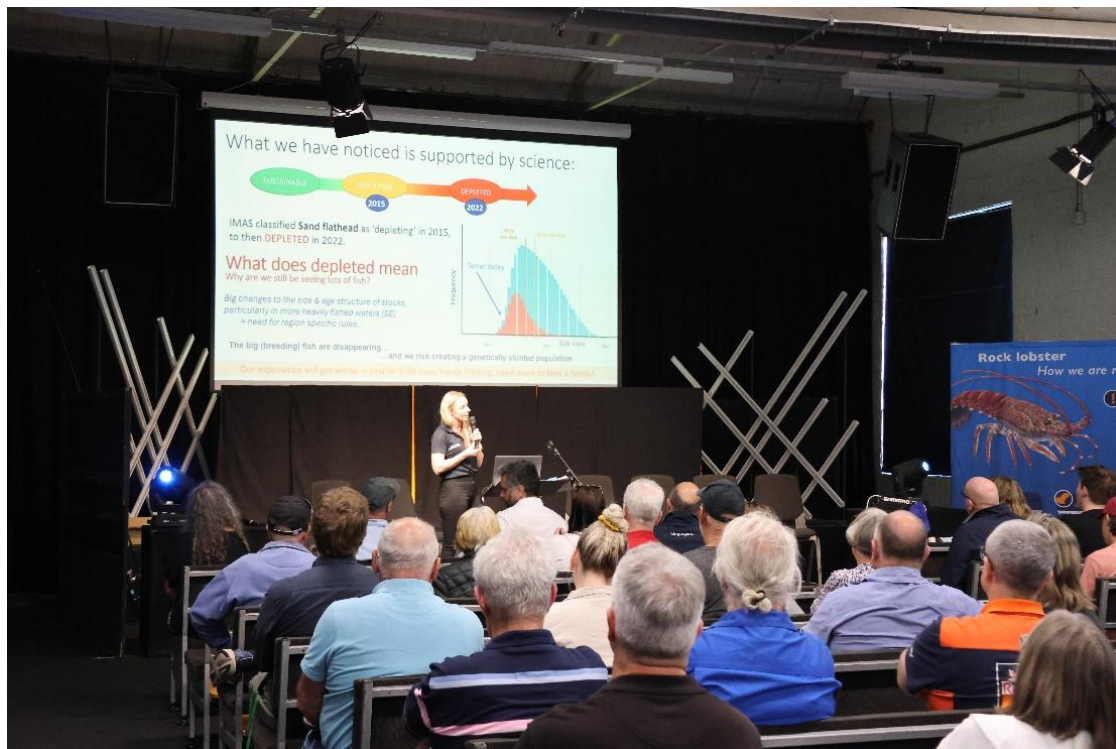
Flathead identification models

Taxonomically correct models of various flathead species were developed to help improve education and awareness of the three most commonly caught flathead species in Tasmania.



Fishing forums

NRE-lead fishing forums in Hobart and Launceston, in collaboration with IMAS, TARFish, IFS and MAST. The forums included dedicated presentations and displays on exploring flathead science and management.



2023

Media

- Scalefish Rules Radio Advertising – ran for two weeks in November and 3 weeks in December.
- Get hooked on new app for recreational fishing – Media release.
- Fishing for next generation (new scalefish rules) – Media release.
- Providing certainty for fishers (scalefish rule changes that were withdrawn) – Media release.
- Protecting the future of scalefish (sand flathead interim measures) – Media release
- Reprieve for flathead – Tasmanian Country News article
- Mercury News article – Recreational fishers say stocks are plentiful and no need for limits (January 2023)
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Feb/Apr – Flathead Fishery Update, depleted, what are we doing, promotion of Flathead Discovery Days.

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 27,500 (estimate)
- Boat ramp signage to share interim sand flathead rules - 400 (estimate)
- Sticker corrections for guide for interim sand flathead rules - 1,500 (estimate)
- Jetty rulers – 750 (estimate)
- Flathead Vinyl Banner
- Fish ID sign re-design - 64 Signs
- Fish ID sticker re-design - 25,000
- Measure your fish poster
- Plastic flexi ruler new design - 25,000
- De-hookers – 1,800
- Handling cloths Flathead for the Future branded x 200
- Five underrated fish brochure (updated to 2021 design) – 5,000 (estimate)
- Sand flathead rebuilding stocks brochure – 10,000 (estimate)
- Flathead Discovery Day promotional flyer
- Flathead species identification factsheet for Tasmania Police
- Agfest:
 - Switch your rig – Pull up banner
 - Switch your rig – Vinyl banner
 - Better flathead future – Pull up banner
 - Meet the flatheads – Media Wall
 - Sand Flathead: Who's Catching Tasmania's favourite fish – Media Wall
 - Scalefish Rules Review: Have Your Say – Vinyl banner

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 48 posts/reels across both Facebook and Instagram
- Topics: Flathead for the Future, responsible handling, Flathead Discovery Days, Flathead survey, explaining Flathead science, new rules
- Reach: 306,490+

Videos

6 videos produced on sand flathead:

- [Flathead Discovery Day](#)
- [How to Fillet Gurnard](#)
- [Biomass depletion – Sand flathead science](#)
- [Genetic Stunting – Sand flathead science](#)
- [Sand flathead need your help](#)
- [How to identify flathead species in Tasmania](#)

Web

- Scalefish rules review webpages (both consultation and announcement of rules), including following publications:
 - Scalefish Rules Review Public Consultation paper
 - Scalefish Rules Review Report on Consultation
 - Scalefish Review Public Consultation Paper August 2023
 - Tasmanian Scalefish Rules Not Progressing Factsheet
 - Scalefish Rules Review Summary 2023
 - Scalefish Rules Review Flathead Summary
 - Scientific advice on sand flathead management scenarios
 - [Sand flathead: What's happening in the fishery?](#)
- News and Events articles:
 - No commercial take of sand flathead in state waters (commercial sand flathead fishing myth busting).
 - Public Consultation – How it works and how to have your say (explainer of consultation process in context of Scalefish Rules Review).

- Checking in on our fisheries (plain language explainer of species stock status)
- Launch of Flathead Discovery Days
- Public consultation opens on Scalefish Rules

App

New Fishing Tas app launched with improved usability and functionality. Replaced Tas Fish Guide app.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

35,319 – 39,224 subscribers. Open rate 44.1% - 52.8%

19 Jan - [Flathead for the Future](#)

- Latest stock assessment
- How fishers can help
- Flathead for the Future program and Flathead Discovery Days
- First mention of management changes being considered, with Scalefish Rules Review beginning in March

17 Mar – [Flathead fishing. What's your experience?](#)

- Promotion of IMAS sand flathead survey

19 Apr – [Have your say on proposed scalefish changes](#)

- Public consultation open and main proposed changes
- Sand flathead interim bag and size limit changes

18 May – [Reminder have your say on proposed scalefish changes](#)

- Promotion of public consultation on scalefish rules
- Promotion of TARFish survey to understand recreational fishers and attitudes

28 Oct – [New scalefish rules take effect](#)

- Summary of new rules, with focus on sand flathead

13 Dec – [Festive fishing news](#)

- Flathead ID guide

People who made a submission to the Scalefish Rules Review

23 Aug – [Scalefish rules consultation re-opens](#)

- Information about second round of consultation and withdrawn submissions.

Stockist newsletter

21 Apr – [Important recreational fishing update](#)

- Update on interim sand flathead rules

Surveys

Flathead Discovery Day Survey – 166 responses.

Publications

- Scalefish Rules Review Public Consultation paper
- Scalefish Rules Review Report on Consultation
- Scalefish Review Public Consultation Paper August 2023
- Tasmanian Scalefish Rules Not Progressing Factsheet
- Scalefish Rules Review Summary 2023
- Scalefish Rules Review Flathead Summary
- [Sand flathead: What's happening in the fishery?](#)

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2023-2024 FY)

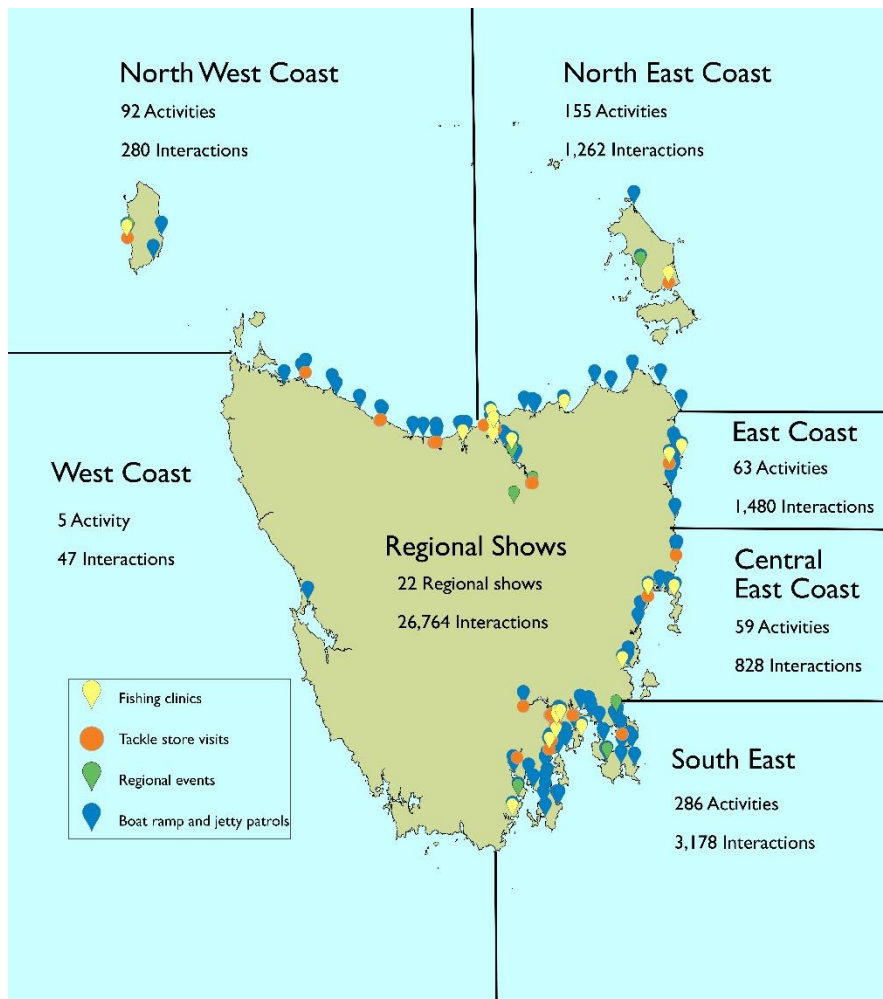
Summary

Number of in-person engagement activities and number of interactions in 2023-24:

Activity type	Target audiences	Number of activities	Number of direct (face-to-face) interactions
Community liaison patrols (boat ramps and jetties)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • School-aged fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	492	5,347
Fishing clinics	• School-aged children • Beginner adult fishers • Female fishers	44	1,083

	• CaLD communities		
Tackle store visits	• Tackle store staff • Moderate and avid fishers	118	223
Regional events	• All fisher types • Fishing families • General public	22	26,764
Fishing competitions and club visits	• Avid fishers • Fishing families	6	422
TOTAL		682 activities	33,839 face-to-face interactions

Map of engagement activities conducted around Tasmania in 2023-24:



Roving Flathead Focus Days

A series of 'Flathead Focus Days' were run at boat ramps and jetties to engage fishers on flathead science, identification and best handling techniques to improve post-release survival.



2022

Media

- ABC News article – Sand flathead depleted
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article – Flathead fishery update, including first announcement of funding for the Flathead for the Future program, and what fishers can do to help. Still notes sand flathead as depleting.

Print/product engagement

- Flathead for the Future car wrap
- Fish ID Sticker ruler x 15,000 (estimate)
- Plastic flexi ruler x 15,000 (estimate)
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide x 30,000 (estimate)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 6 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: fish frame collection, decline in flathead stocks
- Maximum views: not available

Video

December 22 2022 - [Sand Flathead Need Our Help](#)

- Advertised for \$359.71 from 22 Dec to 8 Jan.

Web

New Fishing Tasmania website launched.

App

No noted flathead related updates.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing news

34,162 subscribers, 45.3% open rate.

13 Apr – [Easter fishing round up](#)

- Reminder of sand flathead stock status and how fishers can help sand flathead stocks recover

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2022-2023 FY)

Summary

Number of in-person engagement activities and number of actual interactions in 2022-23:

Activity type	Target audiences	Number of activities	Number of direct (face-to-face) interactions
Community liaison patrols (boat ramps and jetties)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • School-aged fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	174	1649
Fishing clinics	• School-aged children • Beginner adult fishers • Female fishers • CaLD communities	16	465
Tackle store visits	• Tackle store staff • Moderate and avid fishers	22	317
Regional events (including NRE-led events)	• All fisher types • Fishing families • General public	10	11002
Other events (inc NRE-led)	• Avid fishers • Fishing families	14	901
TOTAL		236 activities	14,334 face-to-face interactions

Flathead Discovery Days

- NRE and IMAS collaborated to roll out 'Flathead Discovery Days', which involved 15 sessions covering six locations around Tasmania.



FLATHEAD DISCOVERY DAYS



Sand Flathead need your help!

Come along to one of our **FREE** sessions to learn about the science of flathead and share your fishing experiences

- Explore the latest science with Dr Flathead
- What's the future of flathead look like?
- Take on the 4 Species Flathead ID Challenge
- How old are flathead? Age a fish yourself!
- Know how to fillet a gurnard? Watch a demo
- Tips 'n' tackle for catching other species
- How to be a responsible flathead fisher
- See live underwater footage of flathead



UPCOMING EVENTS

JAN 24 **WOODBIDGE** Marine Discovery Centre
Sessions: 11-1pm 2-4pm 5:30-7pm

JAN 30 **BURNIE** Yacht Club
Sessions: 12-1:30pm 2:30-4pm 5:30-7pm

JAN 31 **LAUNCESTON** IMAS Newnham Campus
Sessions: 12-1:30pm 2:30-4pm 5:30-7pm

FEB 2 **ST HELENS** Wharf
Sessions: 12-1:30pm 2:30-4pm 5:30-7pm

FEB 4 **HOBART** - Derwent Flathead Classic
Sessions: 10:30-12:30pm 1:30-4:30pm

TBC **TRIABUNNA** Wharf
Check website for date and session times

Prizes
& Kids
activities



PLEASE BOOK TICKETS AT fishing.tas.gov.au/events



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON FLATHEAD VISIT
FISHING.TAS.GOV.AU/FLATHEAD







Signage

Temporary signage was installed prior at over 100 locations statewide to alter fishers to rule changes.



2021

Media

- Release of Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy – Media release
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Nov/Jan – First Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Released.

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide x 32,000 (estimate)
- 2000 x lures to promote targeting of underutilised species.
- 2500 x de-hookers
- Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Media Wall
- Fish ID sticker ruler re-design – 30,000 (estimate)
- Five underrated fish brochure - 10,000 (estimate)
- De-hooking brochure (with a focus on sand flathead) - 5,000 (estimate)
- Flathead brochure - 5,000 (estimate)

Where do Danish seiners operate?

Danish seiners cannot fish within one nautical mile of the coast or in Great Oyster Bay, Mercury Passage, the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, River Derwent* and Anderson Bay at Bridport.



Commonwealth vessels only operate outside Tasmanian Scalefish Waters, generally three nautical miles off the coast. All Commonwealth vessels are monitored by vessel monitoring systems (VMS).

Catch information: IMAS 2017-18 Recreational Survey and 2018-19 Scalefish Report.

*Except whiting fishing in a small area inside the mouth of the Derwent.

How you can help

✓ Don't take more than you need for a feed

✓ Use a dehooker or wet hands to release



✓ NEVER use undersize flathead for bait

✓ Fish for other species



Recreational Fisheries Section
Department of Primary Industries,
Parks, Water and Environment
Email: fishing.enquiries@dpiwre.tas.gov.au

FLATHEAD STOCKS

What's happening?



Working Together
for Sustainability



www.fishing.tas.gov.au

Recreational fishers keep over 730,000 flathead every year in Tasmania.

96%

are sand flathead



Stock status =
DEPLETING



3%

are tiger flathead



Stock status =
SUSTAINABLE



1%

are bluespot flathead



Stock status =
NOT ASSESSED



Why are sand flathead stocks declining?

- Flathead are targeted by most of the 100,000 Tasmanians who fish each year. 70% of all recreational fish caught are flathead.
- Stocks are under heavy fishing pressure. Over 50% of flathead are caught in the south east.
- Heavy fishing and environmental changes are influencing flathead biology and stock levels.

What research is being done?

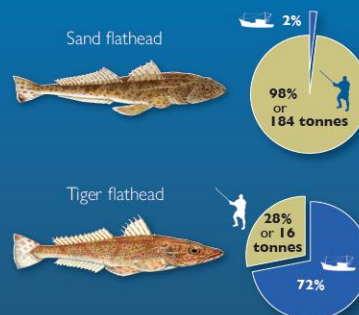
- Better monitoring of sand flathead populations and expanding research to include more areas.
- More frequent recreational catch surveys.
- Investigating whether flathead biology is influenced by climate.

What do size and bag limits do?

- Leave fish in the water to breed.
- The 2015 lower bag limit and increased size limit are reducing the rate of stock decline.
- Despite this, fishing pressure remains high, particularly on females that are faster growing than males.

Commercial fishing

Comparing recreational and commercial catch



The commercial fishery

Tiger flathead are mainly taken by Danish seining. Sand flathead are mostly caught by hook and line.

In Tasmanian waters, there are up to three Danish seine vessels operating, mainly in the south east, targeting school whiting and tiger flathead. Commonwealth Danish seiners take around 170 tonnes of tiger flathead in waters more than three nautical miles off Tasmania's east coast.

Danish seining is not trawl fishing. It catches by encircling and herding fish, not dragging heavy gear across the sea floor.

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 3 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: fish frame collection
- Maximum views: not available

Recreational sea fishing strategy

- 7 posts published on Facebook

Video

None

Web

Unknown as on previous website. Likely:

- Page dedicated to consultation on the Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy including:
 - Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy
 - Action plan for Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy
 - Progress tracker for Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy action items.

App

Unknown. Unlikely any major updates.

Newsletters

Recreational newsletter

32,774 – 32,660 subscribers. 31.3% - 38.7% open rate.

3 Mar - [Women's fishing clinics](#)

- Draft Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy will be released for a six week public comments period later in March, with a final strategy being released July 2021.
- Promoting women's fishing clinics.

24 Jun – [Draft Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Released](#)

- Consultation open on draft strategy until 26 July 2021, including online form and face-to-face consultation sessions.

23 Jul – [Feedback on Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Closes soon](#)

- Reminder to have your say before consultation closes

20 Oct – [Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Released](#)

- Release of Strategy and Action Plan

17 Dec – [Summer fishing news](#)

- Fish responsibly, especially for stocks experiencing depletion like sand flathead and calamari

Publications

- [Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy](#)
- Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy: Summary of submissions on the September Discussion Paper

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2021-2022 FY)

Records have not been presented as significant operational changes occurred due to COVID-19.

2020

Media

- Promoting Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Survey – Media Release
- Reminder to Have Your Say on Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy – Media Release
- Gone Fishing Day (with promotion of Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Consultation) – Media Release
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Aug/Oct – Sharing survey results from Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy pre-consultation survey.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Feb/Mar – Promoting Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy and that consultation opportunities will be occurring later in the year.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article May/July – Results of Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Survey, with flathead continuing to be the most popular fish, 96% was sand flathead.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Nov/Jan – What’s happening with flathead stocks? Including messages about what recreational fishers can do to help, and answering questions about the commercial sand flathead fishery.

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 35,000 (estimate)
- What's the catch products media wall
- What's the catch flyer - 35,000 (estimate)
- Flathead and other fish colouring in materials
- Flathead fold-out ruler quantity between - 20,000 (estimate)
- Plastic flexi ruler re-print – 30,000 (estimate)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 1 post published on Facebook
- Topics: colouring in competition for kids, includes flathead
- Maximum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown. Likely:

- Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy web page
- Recreational fisheries research webpage

App

Unknown. Likely no major updates.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

13 Feb – [Recreational Fishing Survey Results released](#)

- Updated recreational catch stats, including for flathead.

28 June – [Take our survey, what should fishing look like in 2030?](#)

- Promoting survey for recreational sea fishing strategy

6 July – [Winter Fishing Report](#)

- Promoting survey for Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy

8 Aug – [Rock lobster season opening dates](#)

- Thanks for participating in the survey (3200 responses). Next steps – results will be used to inform discussion paper to be released in early September.

7 Sep – [Recreational fishing discussion paper released](#)

- Would appear to be launch of official consultation on the strategy, with an NRE Tas based form to provide feedback.

12 Oct - [Summer is coming - time to go fishing!](#)

- Promoting gone fishing day clinics
- Promoting recreational fishing consultation sessions in Lindisfarne (Oct 12), Eaglehawk Neck (Oct 13), Midway Point (Oct 14), Hobart (October 15), Hobart (multicultural fishers) (Oct 19).
- Promoting information paper and online consultation form for Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy.

27 Oct – [Licences now on sale](#)

- Last chance to have your say on Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy, closing 1 Nov.

17 Dec – [Escaped salmon survey and summer fishing news](#)

- Promoting summer fishing clinics in January.
- Look after sand flathead stocks this summer, including encouragement to fish for a wider range of species and to fish away from popular fishing areas to spread pressure.

Dover-based fishers

135 subscribers, 36.3% open rate.

15 Sept – [Dover fishers, have your say](#)

- Promoting Dover-based consultation sessions for Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy.

North-west based fishers

1,997 subscribers, 35.68%

22 Sept – [Recreational fishing sessions in Burnie, Smithton and Strahan](#)

- Promoting consultation sessions in Burnie (22 Sept), Smithton (23 Sept), Strahan (24 Sept) and promoting discussion paper.

East-coast fishers

950 subscribers, 45.94% open rate.

25 Sept - [East Coast recreational fishing sessions](#)

- Promoting consultation sessions in Orford (28 Sept), Swansea (29 Sept), Bicheno (29 Sept) and St Helens (29 Sept) and promoting discussion paper.

Fishcare volunteers

1 Apr - [What do you think about fishing in Tassie?](#)

Key Rec Sea Fishing Strategy stakeholders

19 Jun – Thanks for your input to our strategy

Surveys

Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Survey – 24 responses

For a better fishing future – 3208 responses.

Publications

- For a Better Fishing Future: Survey Results.
- Towards a 10 Year Vision for Recreational Sea Fishing in Tasmania.

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2020-2021 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	18	54	35	0	0	8	6	0	121
No. of people attending*	479	1663	735	0	0	120	40910	0	43907
Volunteer hours	0	365	290	0	0	80	249	0	984

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2019

Media

- Media release promoting Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy
- Advertising in Advocate for North West Fishing Forums

Print/product engagement

- 600 x fish handling cloths
- Re-print of flathead fold out ruler - 15,000 (estimate)
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 38,000 printed (estimate)
- Top 10 Recreational Species Media Wall

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 4 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: flathead black spots in flesh research; flathead filleting at Agfest; unusual catch when fishing for flathead; flathead science
- Maximum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown

App

Unknown, likely no major updates.

Newsletters

Recreational newsletter

28 June – [Abalone changes proposed, flathead and seal survey outcomes](#)

- Sharing finding from flathead melanisation survey

29 Aug – [Scalefish status report](#)

- Noting sand flathead is still depleted, and recreational fishers catch 20x the commercial catch. Basic responsible fishing tips

18 Sep - [Season dates, rule amendments and Recreational Fishing Strategy](#)

- First promotion of Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2019-2020 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	9	33	25	7	2	1	25	1	103
No. of people attending*	362	1068	708	3700	2500	10	65265	50	73663
Volunteer hours	23	357	317	66	33	6	731	12	1545

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2018

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide – 30,411 (distributed)
- Hot Fishing Spot Maps
- A1 Corflute – Catch Limits explained (featuring sand flathead as example)
- Re-print of Fish ID sticker ruler – 16,800 (distributed)
- Plastic jetty rulers – 323 rulers at 82 locations in English and Mandarin
- Plastic flexi ruler re-print – 12,820 (distributed)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Instagram page launched.

Sand flathead

- 5 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: public fishing form, including direct mention of flathead; Tasmania's most iconic marine species; flathead flesh research; cooking flathead
- Maximum views: not available

Video

Flathead in Tasmania – [Hobart Fisheries Forum Presentation](#)

- 834 views, 12 comments, 8 likes

[Learn how to de-hook a fish](#)

- 178 views, 0 comments, 1 like

Web

Unknown.

App

Unknown, but up to 44,000 downloads.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

27 Feb – [Fishing Forums for Hobart and Devonport](#)

- Promoting fishing forums and fishing hotspot maps

28 Mar – [Going fishing at Easter? All you need to know](#)

- Reminder of sand and tiger flathead catch limits.
- Why you shouldn't keep undersize flatties.

- Promotion of Fishwatch to report illegal fishing.

11 Apr – [Devonport Fisheries forum, King George whiting, scallops](#)

- Promotion of fishing forum to have fishing questions answered.

25 July – [Ever caught a flattie with black flesh?](#)

- Promoting IMAS survey into the melanisation of flathead fillets

11 Sept – [You're invited to the Launceston Fisheries Forum](#)

- Flathead not listed as a specific topic
- Promotion of Fish Lab by Dr James Haddy from IMAS to answer questions about fisheries science, like how you tell age and how quickly a fish grows.

20 Nov – [You're invited to the Hobart Fisheries Forum](#)

- Flathead catch specifically notes as one of the forum topics.

26 Nov – [Hobart Forum changes](#)

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2018-2019 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	15	35	19	11	6	24	35	4	149
No. of people attending*	649	1349	461	6760	2375	634	112318	41	124587
Volunteer hours	32	283	215	132	78	265	1235	185	2425

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2017

Print/product engagement

- Hot fishing spot maps available to order
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide – 31,446 (distributed)
- Fish ID sticker ruler re-design – 15,260 (distributed).
- Plastic flexi ruler re-design – 12,250 (distributed)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 3 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: flathead offence, flathead at Agfest; stock assessment; responsible handling (de-hookers)
- Maximum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown.

App

Unknown. Likely no major updates.

Newsletters

Recreational newsletter

14,496 -19,031 subscribers. 37.9% - 38.6% open rate.

Apr 17 – [Going fishing this Easter?](#)

- Why you should put the little flatties back (including that sand flathead is classified as transitional-depleting).

Dec 20 – [Festive fishing reminders](#)

- Reminder of 32cm size limit for sand and tiger flathead, and to fish responsibly to help rebuild this fishery, including a link to online responsible fishing information.

Stockist newsletter

Dec 13 – [New! Hot Fishing Spot Maps – order now](#)

- Promoting new fishing hot spot maps, which include sand flathead rules.

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2017-2018 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	8	34	13	3	8	7	41	4	118
No. of people attending*	279	1240	15800	6600	782	373	132095	97	157266
Volunteer hours	23	558	173	245	112	18	1300	91	2520

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2016

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide – 41,389 (distributed)
- Sticker ruler – 37,638 (distributed)
- Plastic ruler – 39, 278 (distributed)
- Sand flathead fold out ruler – 10,000 (estimate)
- Meet the flatheads factsheet (species ID)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 1 post published on Facebook
- Topics: flathead education and training
- Maximum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown.

App

Unknown, likely no major updates.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

14,699 subscribers. Open rate 40.1%.

Dec 16 - [Festive season fishing reminder](#)

- Reminder of the new minimum size limit for sand and tiger flathead.

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2016-2017 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	27	30	12	2	8	7	35	9	130
No. of people attending*	1812	659	10800	1300	726	332	117039	267	132935
Volunteer hours	128	292	126	50	93	16	1039	336	2080

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2015

Media

- Have your say on the scalefish rules – media release
- Announcement of new scalefish rules – media release
- Story in the Mercury about Scalefish rules review
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Aug/Sept – Consultation on proposed changes to the scalefish rules close soon.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Dec/Jan – FAQs on new scalefish rules, using tiger and sand flathead as examples.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Feb/Mar – Release of Recreational Sea Fishing Survey results, with flathead noted as the most popular fish.

Print/product engagement

- Re-design of fish ID/measuring signs. Number increased to 60 signs
- Flathead fold-out ruler – 5,000 (estimate)
- Fish ID Sticker Ruler – 12,750 (distributed)
- Plastic flexi rulers – 11,150 (distributed)
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide - 37,589 (distributed).

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 4 posts published on Facebook

- Topics: new scalefish management plan, with direct mentions of flathead; community engagement of proposed scalefish management plan, with direct mentions of flathead
- Maximum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown, but likely a page dedicated to the Scalefish Rules Remake.

App

Unknown, but rules likely updated following Scalefish Rules Remake outcomes.

Newsletters

Recreational fishing newsletter

6,908-8,177 subscribers. Open rate 42% - 42.7%

[23 Jun – Scalefish Management Plan Consultation Period opens](#)

- Includes proposal for sand flathead size limit increase
- Includes proposal for bag limit

[14 Jul – Scalefish review information sessions](#)

- Promoting when public consultation sessions would be on



19 Aug – [Reminder before consultation close](#)

14 Oct – [New scalefish rules announced](#)

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2015-2016 FY)

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	20	44	16	2	6	8	22	16	134

No. of people attending*	1358	1265	14650	1500	271	191	103893	28144	151272
Volunteer hours	74	551	235	22	109	6	563	278	1838

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2014

Media

- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Dec/Jan – Sharing the results from the pilot study into sand flathead stocks and noting there are signs of decline which will be considered when the scalefish rules are reviewed in 2015:
“During the statewide survey of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania (to be published in December), respondents were asked their opinion on increasing the flathead size limit from 30cm to 32cm. They were advised that such a proposal would increase the yield of flesh, with a 25% increase in weight per fish, and also that such a move would result in lower catch rates for a period of time to allow for growth to the new legal-size. Out of 570 respondents, the vast majority (457 respondents or 80%) indicated that they would be supportive of such an initiative, with 76 (13%) opposed and 37 (7%) unsure.

Respondents in the same survey were also asked whether they considered the current possession limit of 30 fish per person for flathead was too high or about right. The majority (346 fishers or 61%) indicated that they considered the limit too high, 197 (35%) suggested it was about right, while 4 (1%) suggested it was too low, with a further 24 (4%) respondents unsure. Respondents who indicated that the limit was too high were asked what they thought would be a reasonable limit - 27% suggest limits of 10 or less, 62% suggested limits of 15 or less while the vast majority (97%) considered limits of 20 or less to be reasonable.”

- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article June/July – Sharing information on how to identify different species of flathead.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Article Oct/Nov – Notice of formal consultation on the scalefish rules set to occur early-mid 2015.

Print/product engagement

- Fish handling cloths x 280 (featuring sand flathead on design)
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide x 38,070 (distributed)
- Plastic rulers 12,110 (distributed)
- Sticker rulers 12,280 (distributed)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 1 post published on Facebook
- Topics: flathead gut content
- Maximum views: not available
- Minimum views: not available

Video

None

Web

Unknown.

App

Unknown.

Newsletters

Fishing News - Contents of articles not available

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2014-2015 FY)

Summary

A wide range of activities and events were conducted all around Tasmania (see table below) to connect with audiences and deliver key messages. Print and physical products were provided to fishers. Improving fish handling was a key element.

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	33	39	18	3	8	10	23	21	155
No. of people attending*	2090	1168	11320	4500	1280	298	107200	17521	145377
Volunteer hours	123	588	272	51	260	12	591	438	2335

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

2013

Print/product engagement

- 1000 de-hookers
- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide x 37,920 (distributed)
- Plastic rulers 14,690 (distributed)
- Sticker rulers 15,210 (distributed)

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 2 posts published on Facebook
- Topics: fisheries research, including flathead; responsible handling (de-hooker) and a recipe
- Maximum views: not available
- Minimum views: not available

Video

None

Web

App

Tas Fish Guide App launched. Statistics not available.

Newsletters

Fishing News - Contents of articles not available

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2013-2014 FY)

Summary

A wide range of activities and events were conducted all around Tasmania (see table below) to connect with audiences and deliver key messages. Print and physical products were provided to fishers. Improving fish handling was a key element.

School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS

No. of events / activities	33	48	20	7	8	8	15	16	155
No. of people attending*	919	1384	14870	4000	513	262	112000	7830	141778
Volunteer hours	86	589	257	195	239	16	203	164	1749

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

Marine Links kits were developed for schools engagement, which included a unit on Sustainable Fisheries featuring a specific section on flathead (links to cumulative impact of recreational flathead fishing and the concept of biomass). Note: Marine Links Kits were actively used for schools engagement from 2011-2021.

2012

Communications and engagement staff and volunteers

- 3 x engagement staff, 1 x communication staff
- 60 Fishcare volunteers providing 2361 hours of service

Media

- Advertisements in regional papers promoting the Recreational Sea Fishing Guide



- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Column Dec/Jan – ‘Understanding our flathead fishery/what we know about sand flathead’.
- Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News Column June/July – ‘How to de-hook your fish and other fish handling do’s and don’ts’.

Print/product engagement

- Recreational Sea Fishing Guide x 40,000
- Plastic rulers x 15,000
- Sticker rulers x 14 735
- “Measure your catch” flashlight key tag
- Fishwatch Fridge Magnets and stickers
- Fletcher the fish posters and sticker promoting responsible fishing messages
- 1000 x de-hookers
- Flathead banner ‘From little fish, big fish grow. Gently the put the little ones back’



- 58 Fish Identification and Measuring Signs
- Fish Identification and Measuring Poster, with various responsible handling messages. 330 copies distributed to tackle stores and schools.

Digital Engagement

Social media

Sand flathead

- 1 post published on Facebook
- Topic: responsible fishing practices (use a dehooker)
- Maximum views: not available
- Minimum views: not available

Videos

None

Web

Unknown.

Newsletters

Fishing News – Known to occur, contents of articles not available

Face-to-face engagement (spans 2012-2013 FY)

Summary

	School classroom activities	Fishing clinics & field activities (inc schools and public)	Fairs (e.g. school or community)	Fishing Events (e.g. forums, boating / fishing shows)	Boat ramp patrols / season open events	Talks & presentations (e.g. fishing clubs)	Regional shows (e.g. Agfest)	Other events (e.g. Wooden Boat Festival)	TOTALS
No. of events / activities	45	55	20	10	4	2	10	13	159
No. of people attending*	1337	1301	14600	5000	670	30	30800	204282	258020
Volunteer hours	79	665	266	191	154	3	651	352	2361

**School activities/events are actual numbers and contacts; other events are estimations of the actual event attendance from event organisers or obtained from web sites.*

Key themes/outputs

Under the 'Fish for the Future' motto, the following key messages were developed and all apply to sand flathead:

'Fish for the future' is our key message and aims to promote responsible and sustainable fishing.



'Only take what you need for a feed' or the modified message 'Only take what you need for an immediate feed' aims to encourage fishers to limit their catch to less than the bag limits and possession limits for their immediate personal consumption.



'Measure your catch' encourages the fisher to find out the size limits and use a measuring device.



'Gently put the little ones back' promotes the correct handling of undersize fish to reduce trauma and survival to grow and breed.



'Think of the environment and other fishers' encourages fishers to consider their individual influences on water quality and habitat degradation and behaviour when using a shared resource.

Marine Links kits were developed for schools engagement, which included a unit on Sustainable Fisheries featuring a specific section on flathead (links to cumulative impact of recreational flathead fishing and the concept of biomass). Note: Marine Links Kits were actively used for schools engagement from 2011-2021.



Do the right thing. Release undersize fish.



2.3 FISH FOR THE FUTURE MATHEMATICS TASKS

1. There are about 130 000 recreational fishers in Tasmania. If each fisher caught their possession limit of flathead on 19 days of the year, how many flathead would be removed from Tasmanian waters?
 - 1a. The weight of legal-sized flathead averages 250g. What would be the weight of the flathead caught by the 130 000 recreational fishers in Tasmania if they all caught their possession limit of flathead on 19 days of a year?
2. There are about 13,000 recreational abalone licences in Tasmania. If each person holding a licence caught their bag limit on 27 days of a year, how many abalone would be removed from Tasmanian waters?
 - 2a. The average weight of a black lip abalone is 340g. What would be the weight of the abalone caught by the 13,000 recreational abalone divers in Tasmania if they all caught their limit of abalone on 27 days of a year?
- As a concluding activity, construct a consequences wheel to examine the impact of people not abiding by size and bag limits. Consider the effects over several days, seasons and years. How will this affect the ability of species to reproduce and future fish stocks?

Caveats

Media

Readily available records of paid media advertising, media releases and some news stories where they have been particularly noted in Government records. These records may not be comprehensive, particularly in earlier years and in capturing third party media coverage relating to sand flathead.

Print/product engagement

Items are provided with distribution number if known. If not, the print quantity for the year is provided, either actual or estimate.

Digital Engagement

Web

Records of specific page updates prior to 2022 are not readily available due to change of platform. However, it is standard practice to have a dedicated information page for any legislative consultation or for significant projects such as the Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy.

App

Specific dates of app updates are not readily available. However, it is standard practice for app content (both for the Fishing Tas app and previous Tas Fish Guide app) to be:

- Updated with any rule changes at the time rules take effect
- Messages notifying users of new rules to display

Newsletters

Recreational Newsletters go to all licenced recreational fishers (except those that have opted out) and other members of the community that have subscribed.

Stockist newsletters go to organisations and businesses which stock NRE Tas fisheries products, such as Recreational Sea Fishing Guides.

Newsletters were sent prior to 2015, both digitally and physically, however records of these newsletters and their contents are not readily available.

Publications

Publications include specific public facing reports or documents which were released, such as consultation reports or strategies.

Community engagement

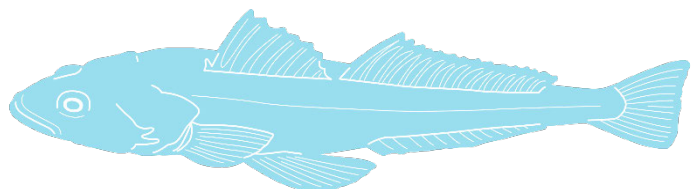
Statistics presented in this document are subject to estimates of actual program delivery details. While not always specifically detailed in this report, sand flathead has been a priority theme embedded across all engagement activity types through this time period.

Sand Flathead Recovery Plan Communications Strategy -

Marine Resources
Sept 2025

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Background and scope

The Government's objective and intent is to recover the Sand Flathead (SF) fishery as fast as possible in the most populated areas in Tasmania. Stocks are now critically depleted in most areas around Tasmania, except Flinders Island, due largely to recreational fishing pressure over time. It has also been deemed as having substantial risk of recruitment impairment and stock damage, based on the IMAS risk assessment conducted using globally recognised Marine Stewardship Council protocols. The Sand Flathead Rebuilding Plan requires a strong, proactive approach to management measures, scientific innovation and communication.

Sand Flathead Stock Rebuilding is a complex, nuanced, potentially contentious challenge, which will require significant education and voluntary behavioural change. Consequently, a carefully considered and multi-faceted communications plan is required that needs continual application and flexibility through the life of the project, until and beyond sustainable status. Building and reinforcing beliefs and attitudes of recreational fishers will be paramount for successful implementation in a most effective, efficient and low-conflict pathway.

This plan includes both broader, ongoing communication messaging and objectives, as well as specific, strategic project announcement stages for the short-term.

Background reading:

[Latest Sand Flathead Stock Assessment, IMAS](#)

[NRE Tas Sand Flathead Stock Rebuilding Plan](#)

Communication objectives

The communication objectives of this strategy are to:

- Build clear community understanding of the causes and extent of SF depletion, including stock levels and genetic stunting.
- Maximise voluntary compliance with wild fisheries regulations by fostering a sense of community responsibility, enforcement presence, and empowerment to create change.
- Increasing public trust in Marine Resource Policy and confidence in Government responsiveness to community concerns.
- Raise awareness of sustainable alternative species to catch, as well as responsible handling and release of sand flathead if caught.
- Gain social license for a Sand Flathead stock rebuilding program.

Background Theory and Rationale

Non-compliance can render the Sand Flathead Rebuilding Plan ineffective.

Recreational fishers are motivated not only by their catches, but also by fun, mental stimulation, sense of achievement, social and environmental interactions, food provisioning and escapism. These human dimensions are increasingly being accounted for in compliance management and advocated for to bolster traditional management and enforcement instruments (Mackay et al. 2018).

Voluntary compliance is a critical and effective mechanism necessary for the Sand Flathead Rebuild Plan Communications Strategy. Promoting and prioritising voluntary compliance would mean fishers understand the benefits of complying with rules and closures, and would minimise the need for costly and challenging law enforcement and ongoing stock enhancement in the future.

Non-compliance in fisheries can be attributed to factors such as the low risk of getting caught/fined, the incentive to break the rules such as the fact that no-fishing zones contain more/larger fish, or the fact that other fishers are also breaking the rules. However, social disapproval and social normative pressure are increasingly driving compliance behaviour in fisheries (Bergseth & Roscher 2018).

Fishers expect not only ecosystem/stock health for their compliance and acceptance of new rules, but also evidence of efforts by the regulator to ensure those positive results.

Fishers need to understand and recognise the legitimacy of rule changes in order to accept and comply with the dramatically reduced bag and size limits that have occurred sequentially since 2015.

Tasmanians therefore need transparency on recovery timelines and trajectories, once the modelling is clear, to provide realistic expectations and hope.

Based on theory by Arias (2015), this efficacy of this communications strategy will rely on the following mechanisms:

- 1. Increasing Government Legitimacy**

It is our task to ensure fishers perceive the legitimacy of the issue, and of us as regulators, through feedback loops that call for inclusion of social, cultural, economic and political contexts in the early stages of resource management initiatives. Importantly, this includes demonstrating that we are accepting responsibility and taking meaningful actions.

- 2. Social Norms**

Norms can have a strong effect on behaviour and compliance. People can comply predominantly because they believe abstaining from Sand Flathead fishing is morally correct and because it is socially accepted to do so, especially if these reasons are well-communicated and believed.

- 3. Providing Alternatives**

Undesired practices can be replaced by more desirable alternatives, also known as 'conservation by distraction'. The ongoing *Mixed Bag / Alternative*

Species campaign being undertaken by Marine Resource's Recreational Fishing Community Engagement Team needs resources to scale up this campaign to broaden reach and impact. This encourages fishers to upskill in fishing for more sustainable yet good-eating, fun-to-catch species such as Australian Salmon and Blue Mackerel.

4. Persuasive Communication

Being persuasive in our communications, including drawing on socio/emotional human dimensions can reinforce, change, or create new beliefs which can significantly enhance voluntary compliance. A targeted, long-term communication campaign will offer broader benefits like building ocean literacy, understanding of regulation and management, and organisational reputation and trust.

Target audiences

The key groups of people to communicate with throughout the project are:

Internal:

Primary:

- Minister Gavin Pearce
- NRE Tas Strategic Communications
- NRE Tas Wild Fisheries staff & FishcareVolunteers

Secondary:

- Biosecurity Tasmania
- Aquaculture NRE Tas
- Marine Conservation/Threatened Species

External:

Primary:

- **Recreational Fishers** & Fishing Influencers (TasCast, [REDACTED], etc)
- Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
- Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing (TARFish)
- Tasmania Police
- Councils (Kingborough Council, Huon Valley Council, City of Clarence, Sorrell, Tasman, Glenmorgan, Flinders Island Council)
- Charter Fishing Operators

Secondary:

- Aquaculture operators in D'Entrecasteaux Channel
- Marine and Safety Tasmania
- eNGOs
- [REDACTED]
- Commercial Fishers/Seafood Industry eg. Kyeema, Mures, Ashmores, etc
- Tacklestores and Service Tasmania Outlets
- Yacht Clubs

- Woodbridge Marine Discovery Centre
- Compliance and Licencing (fishing/licence enquiries service staff)
- CALD fishers
- Children and young people

Key Phases

Each of the communication pillars (see Figure 1)

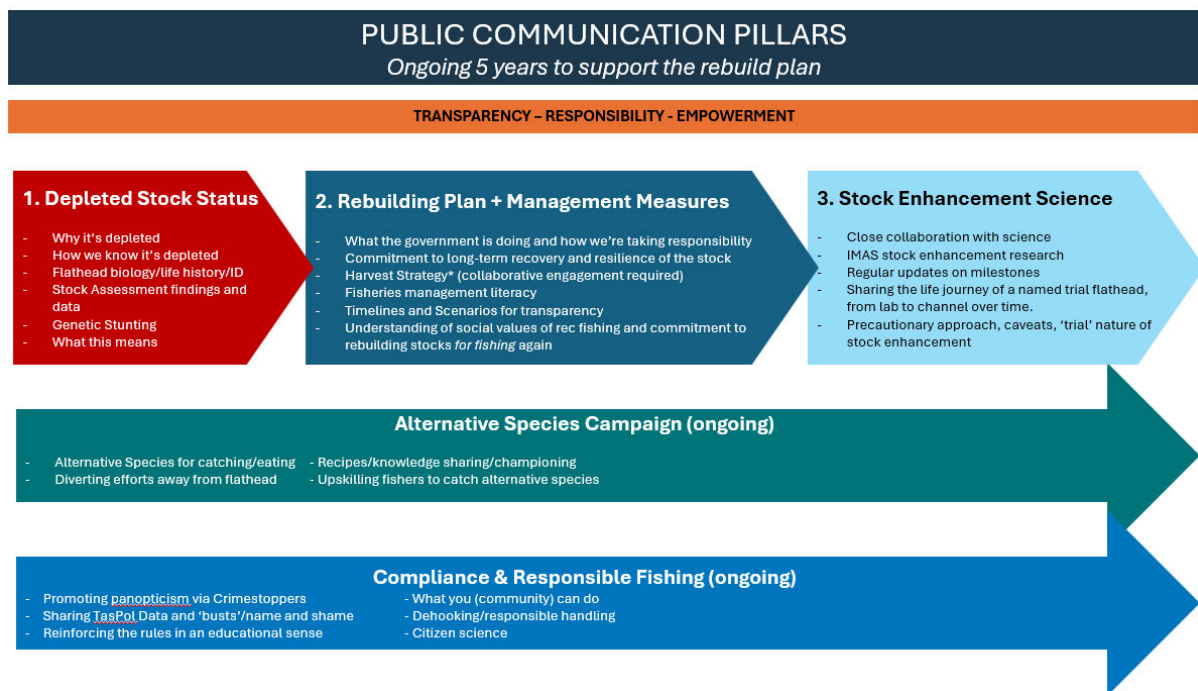


Figure 1. The critical, ongoing communication pillars of the Communications Strategy, with sub-topics requiring consistent education and awareness throughout the life of the rebuilding project.

Minister's Message



The Tasmanian Government continues to improve recreational sea fishing opportunities for Tasmanians.

The Better Fishing Grants program continues to fund improved recreational sea fishing facilities around the State, from new fishing pontoons to weather buoys that provide fishers with real-time weather information. A further \$1 million in funding has been provided to continue this important grant program.

The Government is delivering on its commitment to develop harvest strategies, with work underway on an Abalone Harvest Strategy and Rock Lobster Harvest Strategy. I encourage you to have your say as they are developed, either directly or through your certified recreational fishing body, TARFish.

The recovery of Tasmania's favourite recreational fish species, sand flathead, remains a priority.

This Government's \$900,000 contribution underpins a \$3.3 million

FRDC research program to support stock recovery. Our commitment to recovery is unwavering, as evidenced by the allocation of \$1.2 million for stock enhancement. This is a significant investment to support the recovery of this iconic fishery and I encourage all fishers to share a commitment to abide by the rules and bring back the fishery as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, Tasmania Police checks last summer reported significant compliance issues, particularly in the southeast, where stocks are most depleted. Consequently, I have made the decision to revise on-water possession limits in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, Derwent River, Frederick Henry and Norfolk Bays and the Eastern Zone.

I will consider the effectiveness of compliance checks over the coming summer and determine whether more direct measures to safeguard stocks are necessary. These may include requiring all flathead species caught in the southeast to be landed unfiletted, or potentially the full closure of the sand flathead fishery in this region until there is evidence of stock recovery.

It is incumbent on us all to do the right thing. Our sand flathead fishery is a precious shared resource, which we all want to see recover to be sustainable well into the future.

Figure 2. Minister Abetz's message in the 2024-2025 Recreational Sea Fishing Guide pointing to potential further measures that may be needed to safeguard stocks beyond 2025.

There is importance to the order that information is delivered, for maximising acceptance, ocean literacy and ultimately voluntary compliance. They are:

Key Info 1: Understanding of SF Stock Depletion (ASAP & Ongoing)

Develop strong understanding and beliefs of what's happened to Sand Flathead amongst fishers. This is critical to get right before communicating much about stock enhancement – otherwise enhancement will be seen as an *incentive* to fish for those who haven't grasped the seriousness of the depletion. Announcement of stock rebuilding plan can be done here, for those who need detail, but should be for the sake of legitimacy, not for providing any assurance the challenge is being solved by stock enhancement. Stock enhancement is a last resort, and while feasibility studies have been done, it is not a silver bullet and is costly.

Key Info 2: Flathead Rebuild Plan, SE Stock Closure (Prior to Nov 1 2024)

SE Stock closure, non-compliance statistics from last summer, the need to report illegal fishing, the necessity of the closure to recover stocks, etc (see key messages)

Key Info 3: Landing Flathead Whole to be introduced on 1 March 2026

Engagement to be conducted throughout summer 25-26 with local governments and fishers for purposes of finding fish waste solutions and general preparedness.

Key Info 4: Stock Enhancement program updates (2026 / ongoing)

If key info outputs prior have met objectives. Without a clear understanding of key info 1, promoting enhancement program too widely could be deemed high-risk for recovering stock and long-term stock resilience. Re-name 'stock enhancement' publicly as a 'breeding and restocking trial'.

Key Messages

PRIMARY KEY MESSAGES:

- Fishing for the sand flathead is now **highly unsustainable** in most of Tasmania, according to the latest research.
- The **Government's Sand Flathead Recovery Plan** is a bold, multifaceted approach to recovering sand flathead stocks. It includes new rules to protect SF in key areas, stronger enforcement, and experimental research trials into breeding and restocking fish.
- Marine Police have reported **high rates of non-compliance and evasive behaviour** with Sand Flathead bag and size limits over the last 18 months. 1 in 4 vessels inspected had a confirmed flathead-related offence.
- Disappointingly, **it is unlikely stocks will recover without stronger intervention**, so critical action is needed by government, the Tasmanian community, and researchers to recover Sand Flathead stock.
- Having reached this tipping point, the SF Rebuild Plan is the best chance we have to recover and build a sustainable fishery again that future generations can also enjoy.
- **Recovery is in our hands.** Do the right thing, target alternative species, stick to the rules and report illegal or suspicious flathead fishing to Tasmania Police.

SECONDARY KEY MESSAGES:

- The latest research from IMAS, who assessed the stock through comprehensive surveying and sampling, has confirmed that sand flathead are depleted below critical levels, particularly in the South East of Tasmania.
- This means that recreational fishing pressure is still too high for adults to reproduce effectively, and for stocks to recover, despite the new bag and size limits introduced in 2023 and 2024.

- The routine risk assessment of sand flathead in Tasmania, conducted by IMAS, failed global sustainable fishery standards (MSC), and was deemed high risk of recruitment impairment and stock damage.
- There is also evidence that fishing pressure over the past few decades has caused genetic stunting. This means the sand flathead have evolved to grow slower and stay smaller, as we've removed almost all of the larger, faster-growing ones.
- This means that even if we stopped fishing altogether, stocks are unlikely to ever recover to the normal genetic size structure (i.e. >35cm).
- We need to do more to turn things around. Significant and urgent measures are required by all of us; Tasmanian Government, researchers, and all fishers.
- Our Rebuild Plan is a comprehensive policy with a multifaceted approach to recovering sand flathead stocks to sustainable, fishable levels with normal genetic sizes and age structures. We all have a part to play in recovering the fishery if we want to see it thrive again.

Compliance Messaging

- Disappointingly, through Autumn 2025, Tasmanian Marine Police found:
 - **One in four boats** inspected had a flathead-related offence
 - There was **clear intent** by some on not complying with the latest sand flathead rules.
 - Filleting SF at sea to avoid species identification **undermining compliance efforts**.
 - Non-compliance **compromises the sustainability** of SF.
- Minister Abetz warned the fishing community last year that stronger management measures would need to be taken if compliance did not improve.
- These police observations, along with most recent SF research, justify the immediate SE Closure of SF with the introduction of a catch and release fisher to protect and recover the depleted SF stock.
- It's the responsibility of all of us to understand and comply with these rules.
- If you hear of, suspect, or witness illegal fishing, report it to Tasmania Police on 131 444 or email marine@police.tas.gov.au.

Stock Closure Messaging

- More than half (57%) of sand flathead in Tasmania are taken from this South East region (2023). But currently, only 2% of flathead sampled in the South East are legally sized, i.e. between 35-40cm (2024). We can all turn this around with our Rebuild Plan.
- Closing the South East region for Sand Flathead fishing is critical to flathead recovering in this heavily fished area. It is also critical to trialling the breeding and restocking program in the area. This will:
 - Ensure adequate protection of hatchery-reared juveniles
 - Protect breeding stock
 - Decrease impacts on fish from catching-and-releasing undersized fish
 - Result in more and bigger fish for fishing as soon as possible

Landing Flathead Whole Messaging

- Tasmanian police have unfortunately found fishers many fishers filleting sand flathead at sea to avoid evidence of adhering to bag and size limits.
- We understand filleting at sea is a desirable, natural way to dispose of fish frames.
- However, after a review of alternative ways to enforce adhering to SF bag and size limits from both a fishing, technology and legal perspective, the only feasible option is requiring that all flathead frames are landed in tact, either whole or accompanied by the fillets.
- Requiring that all flathead frames are landed in tact is unfortunately the only feasible way to ensure fishers are following the rules, which are critical to recovering sand flathead stocks around the state.
- To allow time for planning for this change, the requirement to land all flathead frames in tact will be introduced on 1 March 2026.
- There are solutions for using or discarding flathead frames at boat ramps and residences. These include:

1. Value-adding by using fish frames

- Use more of your fish for cooking
 - Cook fish whole
 - Take extra cuts (e.g. wings and roe)
 - Use the frames to make fish stock and soups
- Re-use as bait or berley
 - Use as crayfish bait on a future fishing trip
 - Chop/grind up and use as berley on your next fishing trip
- Use as garden fertiliser
 - Dig ~1ft down into your veggie patch

2. Responsible disposal

- Freeze and take out to sea on next local fishing trip for disposal
- Freeze and dispose of in your garbage bin on pickup day

3. Fish for other species

- Fishers can target a wider variety of species to reduce fishing pressure on flathead, such as Australian salmon, blue mackerel, mullet, kingfish and leatherjacket.

4. Citizen science

- Fishers can send frames in to the IMAS Tassie Fish Frame Collection Program.

Key communication outputs or deliverables

1. Flathead Community Information Session Series

A series of public information sessions/science extensions are to be held over South East Tasmania to be able to discuss the current stock status and answer questions on the rebuild plan. Also open engagement session on landing fillet whole solutions. Transparency and dialogue will be critical in earning public support and legitimacy for new rules. Engaged fishers are more likely to contribute to comply and adopt best practices, reducing long-term management costs. Suggested locations for evening sessions, 6-8pm, with IMAS researchers:

- IMAS Hobart
- Kingston community hall
- Alonnah (Bruny Island)
- Dunalley/Eaglehawk Neck

Alternatively could include as a major session in Annual Recreational Fishing Forums.

2. Video Campaign

Emotive video for wide distribution on television/social media. Could include nostalgic scenes of multi-generational family fishing trip – cross to interviews with IMAS scientists, (Pete Coulson, Sean Tracey) explaining depletion, road to recovery, Hooch (TARfish) on stewardship, back to family on boat for message of ‘recovery is in our hands’ and what they can do to enjoy a day on the water well into the future.

Key brief:

- People need to believe benefits of recovery, and accept rules as legitimate
- People need to see an alternative to meeting psychological needs – fishing for alternative species, that we recognise it’s a quality experience
- People need to feel that compliance is a social norm and they can report illegal fishing

Request for Tender to [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

3. Proactive PR Plan

Targeted, proactive media releases and interview opportunities with broadscale media to control messaging, reduce spread of misinformation and help best translate scientific concepts. Focus on apolitical, science-based messaging. Targets such as:

- TasWeekend (Mercury)

- Carl Hyland (Fishing Column, Mercury)
- Leon Compton - ABC Radio (Statewide, mornings)
- Country Hour ABC Radio
- ABC Rural
- Examiner (Duncan Bailey?)
- Tackleworld and Outdoor Burne (write fishing column for Advocate)
- RecFishTas / Tassie Rec Fishers / Fishing Tasmania / Fishing in Tasmania Facebook Groups, targeted information for admins to disseminate and allow a two-way stakeholder relationship for questions/feedback.

4. 'Follow the Life of a Lab Flatty' Content series

An ongoing content series that personifies a specific flathead from hatching to releasing over the course of the stock enhancement plan, ending with a tag-and-reward-for-release once the fishery is open and classed sustainable again. This would be a novel, engaging, and collaborative way to communicate scientific processes and keep the rebuilding plan front of mind over a long period of time (eg. 4 years). Would demystify the science behind restocking and bring credibility, trust and legitimacy to IMAS and NRE Tas. Highlighting the care and rigour of the research would counteract negativity associated with translocation being a band-aid solution. Suggest ~fortnightly updates on social media.



Figure 2. Examples of concept: 'Name our first hatched flathead! *competition*', 'Today, Furneaux the Flathead underwent a swimming trial with his mates to see what temperature ranges they can swim best in. It's like the Tasmanian Institute of Sport – for fish!', 'Today after XX long years, we say goodbye to Furneaux the Flatty! He's now 35cms and ready to make some nice big babies, in the wild. Good luck, Furneaux – we'll miss you!'.

5. Regular Fisheries Channels

- Flathead for Future webpages, fishing.tas news item, species page, app,
- Regular social media content addressing the many topics/concepts in the key communication pillars (ongoing)
- Updating all print communications (guides, maps, rulers, fish ID signs, etc)

6. Infographic Posters/flyers

A graphically-designed explainer of the science, genetic stunting, statistics and stock closure, rebuild plan, with key message 'recovery is in our hands'. For use at engagement events, boat ramps, schools, yacht clubs, website etc.

7. Flathead Sticker (TBC)

A visually-appealing bumper sticker to distribute, similar to 'Keep Tassie Wild', that builds a community of advocates for flathead stock rebuilding and increase the social pressure and norm for compliance. Including tagline 'Recovery is in our Hands'. - potentially created by local indigenous artist to emphasise cultural and generational responsibility for stock recovery.

Spokesperson/spokespeople

- David Midson
- Jason Jacobi
- Minister Gavin Pearce
- Professor Sean Tracey, IMAS

(Participation by TarFISH would need to be determined based on their views on the management measures.)

Budget and resources (TBC)

- \$20,000 for sand flathead video campaign development, persuasive communication to change behaviour OR documentary funding
- \$15,000 for advertising costs – TV, radio channels and social media promotion
- \$20,000 for developing a suite of 'mixed bag' species campaign videos for distribution across owned channels (social, website, etc) (noting this will have longevity for 5+ years).
- \$10,000 for additional collateral such as stickers, posters, educational resources for distributing to schools/tacklestores/etc and for Community Information Sessions and Field Engagement.

Frequently asked questions

The Cause of Depletion

- ***Are salmon farms causing the depletion?***

In response to community concern, this has been investigated. No difference was found in the number of juvenile sand flathead both near fish farms and away from fish farms.

- ***Was it commercial fishers who depleted Sand Flathead populations?***

No, fishing pressure that caused stock declines was caused mostly by recreational fishing. Commercial fishing for sand flathead has been banned since November 2023. Even prior to this ban, commercial fishing only accounted for approximately 2% of total Sand Flathead catch. You can see both recreational catch and commercial catch data over the last in [this report](#).

- ***How did it get this bad?***

Messaging around how this kind of science wasn't available in past decades, nor was our knowledge on their biology/life history, vulnerability to overfishing, etc. Now, regular stock assessments by independent researchers are prioritised for most significant fisheries in Tasmania to inform sustainable management.

- ***But I seem to be catching flathead in my area?***

Region	Fishing Mortality (F/M)	Fish Biomass (B/B_0)	Spawning Potential (SPR/SPR_0)
D'Entrecasteaux Channel	Highly unsustainable (>3)	Below critical limit (<0.1)	Below critical limit (<0.1)
Frederick Henry & Norfolk Bays	Highly unsustainable (>4)	Below critical limit (<0.2)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
Mercury Passage	Highly unsustainable (>4)	Below critical limit (<0.2)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
Great Oyster Bay	Highly unsustainable (>7)	Below critical limit (<0.1)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
St Helens	Highly unsustainable (>3)	Below critical limit (<0.2)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
Bridport	Highly unsustainable (>3)	Below critical limit (<0.2)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
Tamar	Highly unsustainable (>7)	Below critical limit (<0.1)	Below critical limit (<0.1)
Stanley	Highly unsustainable (>2)	Above limit (>0.2)	Below critical limit (<0.2)
Flinders Island	Sustainable (<1)	Sustainable (>0.4)	Sustainable (>0.4)

For a sustainable fishery, fishing mortality (F) should be less than natural mortality (M) $\rightarrow F/M$ should be <1 . For Fish biomass, estimates current (fished) biomass (B) relative to unfished biomass (B_0). Values below 0.2 (20% unfished levels) are considered to be depleted. Spawning potential compares reproductive output of individuals in a fished population (SPR) with average reproductive output for an unfished population (SPR_0). Values below 0.2 (20% unfished levels) are below critical 'replacement' level.

Stock Enhancement

- ***Why can't we re-stock flathead like Victoria does?***

While there is a lot we can learn from existing fish re-stocking programs (like Victoria's re-stocking program for dusky flathead) it's important to make sure any stock enhancement program we run is right for Tasmania.

No one has run a re-stocking program for sand flathead before and restocking marine systems is different too restocking contained freshwater systems like a lake or dam.

The program is also about more than just increasing sand flathead numbers. We're also trying to make fish that grow faster more common.

- ***Why can't we move bigger ones from the mainland?***

There is regional variability in movement, growth and reproductive biology of sand flathead, down to fine scales. There is ongoing work to assess genetic diversity between different Flathead populations. It is the safest option to most closely mimic the genetic structure of Southern Sand Flathead and stick with Tasmanian stock.

- ***Why aren't there any being moved to Great Oyster Bay?***

A feasibility study led by IMAS considered an enhancement project to recover all stocks around Tasmania to be unrealistic due to the scale and cost involved, however, once a trial has been conducted in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, feasibility of stock rebuilding in other areas can be assessed.

Monitoring and evaluation

This communications strategy will be evaluated using the following measures:

- Voluntary compliance with flathead rules increases
- Low-conflict acceptance of rebuild plan by all key stakeholders
- Number/frequency of illegal flathead fishing reports
- Increased reach, engagement and regularity on educational posts, social media
- Website visitation for Flathead for the Future pages
- Reach for video/ad campaigns
- Enquiries received about closure zones/alternative species/bag limits etc
- Attendance and engagement at Information Sessions
- Media Monitoring – publicity reach, message alignment, and sentiment
- Engagement/sentiment at Harvest Strategy engagement sessions

Communications action plan

Timeline of Sand Flathead Recovery Communications & Actions

Required Activities	Time	Key Messages
Publication of the Sand Flathead stock rebuilding plan Broaden awareness of 23/24 SF stock assessment Release \$1.2M to IMAS for stock enhancement	Oct 2025	• Stock depletion and biology literacy • Our bold plan to fix it
SE SF Stock Closure Announce whole frame landing requirement for 2026	Nov 2025	• Stock depletion • Non-compliance
Major Flathead PR Campaign Public information sessions	Nov / ongoing	• Stock depletion • Science extension • Engagement on solutions for landing frames • Responsible and alternative fishing education
Enhancement trial updates	2026	<i>If education and compliance objectives met from above stages</i> • Experimental research trial • Follow the life of a lab flatty



Approvals

The appropriate Business Unit Manager (and Division Director if applicable, based on your agency's approval process) must approve the Communications Strategy.

Business Unit Manager

Division Director (if applicable)

Manager - Communications Unit

Name

Name

Name

Signature

Date:

Signature

Date:

Signature

Date: