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Tasmanian Government

Ms Jane Howlett MP
Member for Lyons

14 OCT 2026

Email: HAProcedure@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Howlett

In Parliament on 13 August 2026, you asked the following question on behalf of your constituents:

Many constituents across my electorate have been avid saltwater anglers for years, enjoying fishing with their families. While the government's decision to close the sand flathead fisheries has been disappointing for many, there is also an understanding that stock needs time to recover. There is nothing wrong with catch-and-release fisheries for now, but constituents are asking what the Government is doing to support stock recovery and ensure there are sustainable fisheries for future generations to come.

Firstly, thank you for the question about this important fishery. Sand flathead has been targeted by around 70,000 fishers annually and the most recent statewide fishing survey estimated that they accounted for around fifty percent of all fish caught by recreational fishers in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government is taking an integrated approach to rebuilding sand flathead stocks. This includes combining traditional management actions, stock enhancement and fisher-based initiatives to recover the stock as quickly as possible.

I am pleased to advise that the Government's $1.2 million flathead restocking program has begun, with broodstock now delivered to the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS). This is an important milestone in getting the fishery back to a sustainable footing.

Infrastructure for captive breeding is being progressively brought online, with broodstock, larval rearing and juvenile grow-out systems being commissioned over the remained of 2026. These facilities will support spawning, larval culture and juvenile production activities ahead of the planned release of the first juvenile cohort into the wild in early 2027.

The rebuilding efforts also include community engagement activities and fisher stewardship, being delivered by the Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing and IMAS.

Scientific and fisheries management advice is clear: without decisive intervention, the sand flathead fishery may not recover, or recovery could take an unacceptably long time.

Stock assessments show the fishery is depleted in most of the State, with only 1 per cent of fish above the legal size limit in the south east and breeding potential reduced to as low as 5 per cent of an unfished population.

The south eastern zone closure and statewide “landing fish whole” requirements commenced on 1 March 2026 and are essential to protecting depleted stocks and supporting long term recovery. These measures are designed to ensure more, bigger fish for Tasmanians in the future and to protect the fishery for the next generation.

This was not a decision made lightly, but it provides the best chance for this $1.2 million restocking program to get sand flathead back to manageable levels.

We want to see our future generations fishing for Sand Flathead, and that’s why we have made hard decisions and are investing in this fishery.

Thank you again for raising this matter on behalf of your constituents.

Yours sincerely



Hon Gavin Pearce MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water