



**SUMMARY OF
TASMANIAN SCALEFISH PROPOSALS
AND
TARFISH POSITIONS**

June 2023

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Introduction

The recently released National Recreational Fishing Survey showed that in Tasmania, recreational fishing contributes:

- a. \$270m to Gross State Product (GSP)
- b. Supports 2,670 FTE jobs in Tasmania

This is more than commercial abalone, rock lobster and scalefishing combined deliver, which contribute \$186m and supporting 1,052FTE's.

It is TARFish's view that the package of proposals does not adequately recognise the benefits of recreational fishing in Tasmania, including the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing.

The package of proposals in the current Scalefish Fishery Rules Review would be the single largest group of cuts and restrictions to recreational fishers at a single point in time that TARFish is aware of.

Whilst we welcome the new-found commitment of the Tasmanian Government to sustainable fisheries management, TARFish is concerned that the proposals fail to consider collective impacts or contemplate offsets for those impacts. For example, southern calamari, sand flathead and striped trumpeter are 3 of the top 5 consumed recreationally caught species.

Specific concerns of the package of the proposals:

1. Noting the inclusion of the Government's "Depleted and depleting species policy", there is no information provided on what contribution each of the proposed changes (singly and collectively) will deliver toward rebuilding the target biomass and over what time frame. It is unlikely that the Government is proposing them without any insight into this and any modelling undertaken should be provided publicly. If modelling hasn't been undertaken by the Government, it should be, and provided publicly.
2. There is no evidence of any modelling, or indeed any discussion, on the totality of the impact on recreational effort, including unintended consequences such as the potential impact on other species through displaced effort (if effort does not reduce). For example, increased retained catch of Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) or other deepwater species such as blue-eye trevalla if the striped trumpeter bag limit is reduced by half.
3. No modelling has been undertaken on the potential economic and jobs impact of the collective changes on recreational fishing at a state-wide and regional level.
4. Consultation on the package of complex proposals is short and should be over a longer period.
5. A further concentration of the Minister's decision-making powers is a reduction in democratic process that would remove appropriate checks and balances and should not be supported. TARFish notes that the Abalone Rules were overturned in the Tasmanian Parliament in 2021 which provided the only opportunity for scrutiny of government decision making. This is consistent for Scalefish Fisheries Rules.

Broader fishery management risks and opportunities

Whilst we understand that this is a "rules review" process and in some senses, narrow in scope, TARFish has identified some risks and opportunities that have not been considered when developing the proposals.

1. Disenfranchisement of recreational fishers
The comprehensive package of restrictions is likely to have a significant impact on the vast majority of marine recreational fishers and thus implications for compliance and ultimately government reputation.

The review does not provide any guidance on how compliance and monitoring will be supported and funded should the raft of proposed rules come into effect.

2. Impact on recreational fishing dependent businesses

TARFish believes the majority of recreational fishing dependent businesses accept there are issues with the fisheries identified in the rules review and are generally supportive of change. TARFish has been engaging directly with tackle shops and boat sellers to understand the potential impacts on these businesses. The combined impact of all changes being implemented at once is the greatest concern with some businesses already deferring orders of products and others concerned about the risk posed by long-lead times not allowing for an orderly transition, this is particularly relevant for boat sellers.

3. Scope of communication and engagement on alternatives

As the consultation is confined to what is contained in the rules review, it does not facilitate a mature and robust conversation on potential offsets to the collective impact on recreational fishers. For example, TARFish has identified a range of alternatives to support recreational fishing (below). TARFish hopes the Government will be receptive to this type of balanced approach.

Alternative fishing opportunities should be supported and enabled

The overall package of proposed management changes for recreational fishers is very restrictive and we encourage the Government to give some relief by providing alternative fishing opportunities.

TARFish supports expediting alternative fishing opportunities, particularly in the south east including but not limited to:

Rock lobster

- Establishment of recreational only fishing areas on the East Coast for rock lobster
- Implementing a winter rock lobster season
- Supporting the rock lobster translocation program

Calamari

- Establishment of recreational only areas for calamari at Port Sorrel and in the south east, including Norfolk and Frederick Henry Bays.
- No change to calamari management settings for recreational fishers noting the combination of reduced sand flathead bag limits and calamari bag limits would have a high impact on recreational fishers, particularly in the south east.

Gummy shark

- Interim increase of the bag, boat and possession limits of gummy shark to 3/3/6 from 2/2/5.

Scallop

- Opening of a limited scallop season in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel if the scallop assessment indicates sufficient recovery.

FAD's

- Rapid deployment of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the south east to provide alternate fishing activities

Submissions from TARFish member organisations

TARFish, as the peak body for recreational fishing, has member organisations that have made separate submissions. Specifically:

- Australian Fishing Trade Association (AFTA)
- Australian Underwater Federation (AUF)
- Sea Charter Boat Operators of Tasmania (SCBOOT)
- Tasmanian Game Fishing Association (TGFA)

TARFish welcomes the endorsement of TARFish’s submission and position by these organisations in their submissions.

Consultation and timing

TARFish maintains its concern that whilst there has been a high number of consultation meetings that these broad based, short time-frame consultations have not been sufficiently targeted to yield good quality information. An example of this is the lack of direct engagement of tackle stores or boat sellers and other fishing reliant businesses to understand the impact of proposed changes.

The short duration of the public meetings meant many of the fisheries, aside from calamari, sand flathead and spearfishing, were not canvassed sufficiently. This is particularly true in terms of the proposed changes to Ministerial powers, and the proposed sardine fishery. Fishers made the comment to TARFish that meetings were shut down and too short with limited time to canvas their views on the other species and matters contained in the review.

The scope of the proposed changes is a huge amount of information for recreational fishers to process and understand and both TARFish and RecFAC flagged the need for further extension of the consultation period. This recommendation was not adopted.

Combined, the short duration of public meetings and the volume of information provided, meant the ability of the government to consult fishers and receive feedback was restricted.

As noted in other sections, the risk of fisher non-compliance is heightened due to the low level of information provided to fishers in the lead up to the proposed changes. For many, this is the first they are aware of any issues with the fisheries in this rules review. Further, there has been a short period to provide information to fishers regarding critical science and the impact of the proposals on all sectors. This is reinforcing fisher distrust of Government and may influence the overall successful implementation of the changes.

It is TARFish’s view that not all changes should be implemented simultaneously and that a staged approach be undertaken over a number of years so that effective monitoring of displaced fisher effort can be assessed and understood.

Commitment to return access to recreational fishers

In the absence of harvest strategies and recovery strategies for any of the species listed, TARFish is seeking a firm Government commitment that recreational fisher access will be returned when each fishery reaches its target biomass levels.

In addition, a commitment to funding and implementing processes to require the scientific reassessment of biomass levels.

A regional approach to management

TARFish has considered the proposals and believes the best approach is to consider regional application of management controls and that a package of off-sets or benefits in each region to support recreational fishing during the rebuild phase of the fisheries identified as being depleted or depleting. Some suggestions are provided below but there may be others.

TARFish's specific response to each proposal is shown later in this document.

North Coast

- Creational of a calamari recreational only area at Port Sorell
- Rapid deployment of FADs to improve fishing opportunities
- Interim increase of the bag, boat and possession limits of gummy shark to 3/3/6 from 2/2/5.

East Coast

- Establishment of recreational only areas for rock lobster
- Implementing a winter rock lobster season
- Expand the rock lobster translocation program
- Rapid deployment of FADs to improve fishing opportunities
- Interim increase of the bag, boat and possession limits of gummy shark to 3/3/6 from 2/2/5.

South East

As the region most impacted by the proposed changes, TARFish strongly supports a strong investment and effort to maintain access to recreational fishing opportunities including:

- The south-east to be a recreational only area for calamari
- A complete ban on commercial sand flathead fishing
- Interim increase of the bag, boat and possession limits of gummy shark to 3/3/6 from 2/2/5.
- Opening of a limited scallop season in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel if scallop assessment indicates sufficient recovery.
- Direct funding for the Better Fishing Grant to improve:
 - Shore based fishing access
 - Habitat restoration including but not limited to seagrass restoration, angasi oyster reef restoration and kelp restoration

Depleted and depleting species policy

TARFish accepts the Department's commitment to recover all depleting and depleted species including the short-term objective to rebuild stocks to at least 20% of unfished biomass, with a goal of 40% thereafter.

However, the policy is silent on its approach to recovery timelines.

It is important to understand for each species, what trajectory for recovery the department is seeking so that relevant input from TARFish can be made on how the proposed rule changes are implemented. For example, a staged approach to the flathead changes may achieve the interim goal of 20% or a final goal of 40% but over a longer timeframe. Equally as importantly is what triggers relaxation of any cuts and restrictions once targets are reached. This is an extremely important consideration for recreational fishers in determining their overall support for any proposed changes. Presenting the proposed rule changes in the absence of any assurances or commitments to returning access can, and has, created significant distrust of government and anxiety amongst many recreational fishers.

Regarding the principles that have guided the proposed rule changes, TARFish generally supports all three with the following notes:

1. Size limits to contribute to sustainable stocks
Note: TARFish generally supports size limits that allow fish to reach maturity and contribute to stock resilience and re-build. However, there may be unintended consequences on a species from this implementation such as increased post-release mortality. It is important to understand the net benefit of any proposed size limit change on an individual stock.
2. Catch limits to reduce fishing pressure on stocks with management changes to be proportionate to each sector's impact on the stock.
Note: TARFish does not support boat limits as they exceed the individual's rights, potentially providing a barrier to participation, and may impact more heavily on those trying to reduce the cost of living when fishing for food (this is particularly the case for sand flathead, calamari and striped trumpeter). Supporting information to evidence the "proportionality" of the proposed management changes must be provided publicly to demonstrate that the changes are proportionate. This is absent from the public consultation paper.
3. Rules to support compliance with catch and size limits.
Note: TARFish supports increased compliance checks and monitoring, particularly for sand flathead to ensure high levels of compliance. However, TARFish does not support landing whole fish or frames for sand flathead – this is discussed further under sand flathead. In addition, there is no information how compliance will be supported and funded should such a large-scale suite of management changes be implemented.

Amend limits for depleted/depleting species by public notice

The proposal to introduce a rule to allow the Minister, or their delegate, to introduce or amend catch limits and/or size limits that apply to any part of the fishery, by published notice is not supported by TARFish at this time.

As noted in TARFish's response to the Government's Discussion Paper on the Review of the Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995, almost all decision-making powers reside with the Minister for Primary Industries and Water. There are current risks with this including:

- No requirement to provide a statement of reasons when a decision is made,
- The absence of harvest strategies (except abalone) and other binding documents such as a resource sharing framework to inform and guide decisions,
- The potential for political influence of decisions,
- No effective review or appeal rights to decisions unless through the Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal (RMPAT) or in some instances the parliament (for rule changes).

TARFish notes that the Abalone Rules were overturned in the Tasmanian Parliament in 2021 which provided the ONLY opportunity for scrutiny of government decision making. A further concentration of the Minister’s decision-making powers is a reduction in democratic process with appropriate checks and balances.

Proposed prohibition of spearing certain species

The proposal states that the proposed ban on spearfishing for; banded morwong, sand flathead, bastard trumpeter, and striped trumpeter, will mitigate the risk of spearing fish that are “undersized” or “oversized.”

The Government has not provided any information as to the scale of this potential risk.

The Tasmanian Recreational Fishing Survey 2017-18 (Lyle et al, 2019), states, *“Overall, line fishing accounted for 97.8% of the total finfish and squid catch (2.5 million fish), with a further 1% (22,500 fish) taken by gillnet.”*

This would suggest that, at maximum, spearfishing is likely to represent just 1.2% (or around 25,000 fish) of recreationally caught fish across all finfish and squid catch. This includes flounder, which accounts for around half of all spear-caught fish (~12,000).

In terms of the proposed ban on the species, Lyle et al (2019) identifies that spear fishers took:

- 1,730 flathead
- 1,352 other Scalefish

To put this in context, if a spearfisher got it wrong one in ten times (and we are not suggesting that this is true but using a high number to illustrate the point), and speared an under- or oversized fish, that would equate to ~300 fish.

The proposed ban is an extreme and punitive approach to a risk that has not been verified on a small cohort of fishers, with limited stock benefit.

This is even more striking when considered in the context of stock losses from fishing mortality (fish not surviving being line-caught or gillnet caught when released) and predation from seals.

TARFish sought feedback from Tasmania’s spearfishers, and discussions indicate that spear fishers:

- Typically, only take what they need for a feed on that day and are much less likely to ‘bag-out’ or to fish for the purpose of having fish in the freezer;
- Are very conscious of their impact on targeted fish and are typically more cautious when fishing to reduce unintended catch.
- Have a code of conduct via the Australian Underwater Federation (AUF).

TARFish position

TARFish does not support the spearfishing ban for any of the species listed.

To ban spearfishing for this small fishing community is not warranted, overly punitive and inconsistent with The Government's Principle 3 that "management change should be proportionate to each sectors impact on the stock".

The proposed ban is an extreme and punitive approach to a risk that has not been verified on a small cohort of fishers, with limited stock benefit.

Southern Calamari

Introduction

Southern calamari are one of the top 5 recreationally caught fish targeted for consumption (an eating fish).

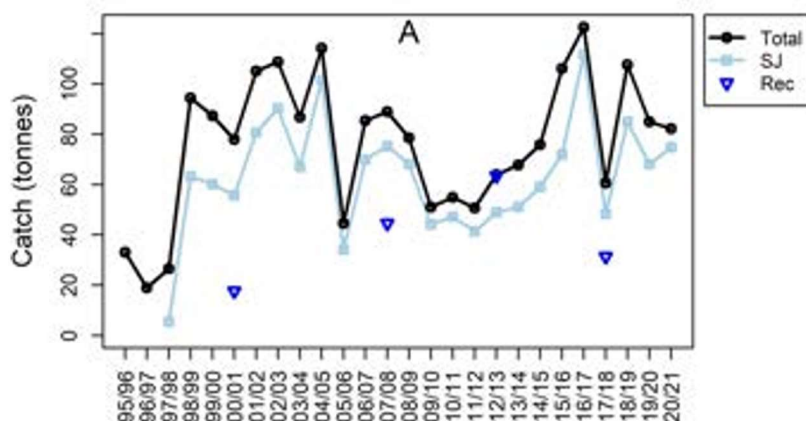
It is one of the most important species to recreational fishers.

Notably, calamari are a short-lived species that die shortly after spawning, meaning there is no disadvantage to calamari reproduction and population from taking the fish post-spawning.

Commercial and Recreational catch

The fishery had been assessed as sustainable until relatively recently, which has correlated with changes to commercial fishing effort, with increasing effort focussed on the north coast.

As can be seen from the chart below, commercial catch has returned to levels similar to that prior to 2009 – fishing effort was concentrated in the south and south east at that time. The fishery was considered overfished and in 2009 and a southern calamari licence was introduced. Unfortunately, this was not sufficiently early or effective to prevent the dispersal of spawning aggregations in southern Tasmania. This part of the fishery has not recovered.



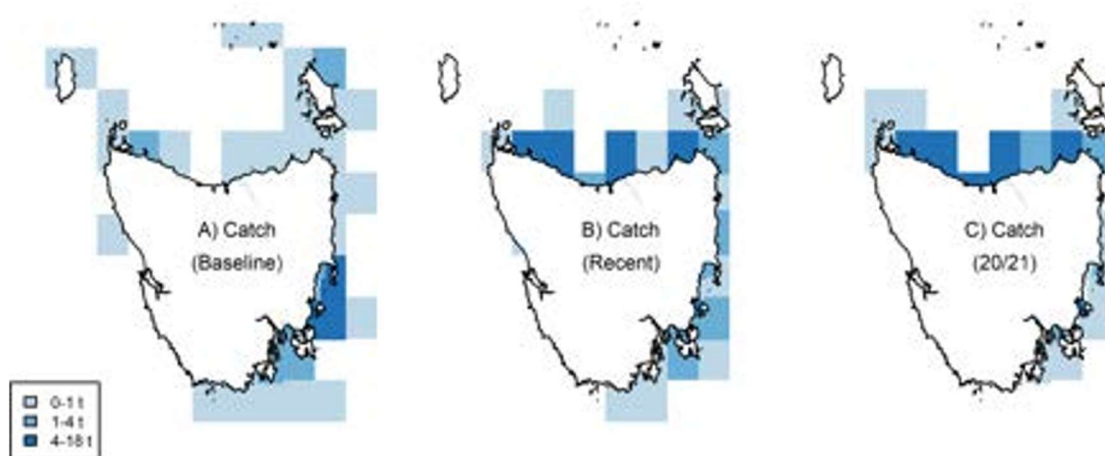
The estimated statewide Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) was estimated to be 75 tonnes in the Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2018-19 (the Assessment (2018-19))

The Assessment states "Catches of more than 100 t in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2018/19 exceed recent estimates of the state-wide maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of 75 t by more than 40%. The North coast

region is of particular concern in this respect, given that recent catches in this area exceed the estimated regional MSY of 33 t by more than 100%. While uncertainty remains about the status of stocks, recent fishing mortality has been excessive and is likely to cause the stock to become recruitment impaired.” Concerningly, at that time, IMAS indicated there is a similar pattern of overfishing risks to that experienced in the south east fishery several decades ago.

The most recent Tasmanian Scalefish Assessment 2020-21 shows that the commercial catch remains above the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) of 75t and well above the 33t MSY for the north coast.

The image below shows the concentration of fishing effort on the north coast over time.



The recreational catch and effort are shown in the table below. The data is taken from the Surveys of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania (Lyle, et al) for 2012-13 and 2017-18. Approximately equal catches of calamari are taken by boat- and shore-based fishers. Catch effort (% of numbers of calamari caught) is predominant in the southeast and is shown regionally below:

Region	2012-13		2017-18	
	% of fish caught	Tonnes*	% of fish caught	Tonnes*
West Coast:	-		1%	
Total West Coast:	-		1%	
North West:	18%		8%	
North East (incl Tamar Est):	7%		10%	
Total North:	25%		18%	
East Coast (North)	13%		13%	
East Coast (South)	29%		17%	
Total East Coast	42%		30%	
Derwent Est. and Channel	8%		18%	
Great Oyster Bay	6%		4%	
North West Bay	1%		7%	
Southern - other	18%		22%	
Total South-East:	33%		51%	
TOTAL	100%	64	100%	31

Only 18% of recreationally caught calamari is taken from the North (~5.6 tonnes Rec v 28.8t Comm (2017-18).

The State Government’s 2018 Review of the Southern Calamari fishery (Analysis of Management Tools) states, “*there has been a substantial increase in catch and effort on the north coast, which is reflected in the total commercial catch for 2015/16 and 2016/17. Consequently, this increasing interest has resulted in increasing overlap and interactions within and between the commercial and recreational sectors.*”

The proposed commercial amendments (introduction of licensing and trip limits) are expected to only “stabilise” not reduce commercial fishing effort. The total commercial catch under this proposal can and may exceed the Maximum Sustainable Yield.

Commercial fishery management controls should demonstrate with sufficient certainty that the sectors catch will be constrained within MSY. This begs the question as to why other management controls have not been proposed for the commercial sector.

Government Proposal

Recreational

Limits	Current	Proposed
Bag limit	10 fish	5 fish
Possession limit	20 fish	10 fish
Boat limits	No limit	15 fish

Commercial

- Introduce two limited licence types for the north west and north east
- Commercial fishers that do not qualify for the proposed licences will have trip limits (shown in table below)

Licence	Current	Proposed
Holders of a scalefish licence who do not qualify for a calamari licence (excluding Furneaux Group waters)	No limit outside south east waters. 10 fish in a 24 hour period in south east waters	10 kg per day
Holders of a rock lobster licence	15 fish	10 kg per day
Extended daily limit in Furneaux Group waters for seine licence holders, including Danish seine, who do not qualify for a calamari licence	No limit	100 kg per day

The proposed amendments aim to:

- Reduce fishing pressure from the recreational catch

- Limit the risk of increased fishing pressure on the north coast.

Notably, the aim of providing long-term stock resilience to rebuild a sustainable fishery is not included.

TARFish position

- TARFish rejects the proposed bag, boat and possession limits for recreational fishers.**
 - The recent implementation of an extended spawning closure in northern Tasmania to 5 weeks for recreational fishers may provide sufficient protection of the spawning biomass, the effect of the closure should be given time to take effect and reviewed before any further management controls are contemplated.
 - TARFish also supported a 6-week closure to provide further protection from pre-spawning aggregations but this advice was not adopted by government. We re-state our support for this approach.
 - The proposals are overly punitive to recreational fishers.
- TARFish does not support the proposed commercial management controls** (i.e. limited licences and daily limits) on the basis that:
 - It may not reduce commercial catch at all
 - The management controls (licensing arrangements) are inconsistent with the aim of a catch reduction to maintain catches within MSY at both a state and regional level. The management control as described will only “limit the risk of increased fishing pressure”. Limited licence arrangement could be suitable in combination with other settings as described below.
 - There is no protection for pre-spawning stock from commercial targeting which may be having a significant impact on population and recruitment, particularly in northern Tasmania.
 - The use of daily limits is likely of limited benefit noting the Governments own analysis of management tools (2018) stated “*Trip Limits may be of limited benefit to the stock...*”
 - The proposed commercial arrangements fail to consider more effective alternatives based on cost and complexity which indicates an underfunding of sector management.
- TARFish proposes total allowable commercial catch (pre and post spawning) with the TACC split regionally, noting this is made easier with licencing of calamari fishers statewide.**
 - A catch cap approach could also be considered, that required licensed calamari fishers to report daily landings (could be by phone) and fishery zone closed when limit reached.** Allowance in the cap could be made for non-licensed (NL) commercial landings, this could be a % of the actual cap and based on previous fishing data (eg set aside X% for the NL group). Going forward under the new arrangements this % should be revised based on actual fisher behaviour operating under the 10 kg per day arrangement. Basically,
 - Having some control over commercial take should give some confidence to the recreational sector that the stocks are being managed.
- TARFish supports recreational only-areas for southern calamari** (noting that the D’Entrecasteaux Channel is already effectively recreational only) with specific consideration for:
 - Southern and Eastern Tasmania; and
 - the Port Sorell area noting its high level of importance to recreational fishers.
- TARFish supports, and has requested for some time, additional monitoring of the recreational take of southern calamari.** As this has not occurred, it would be logical to at least wait for the outcomes of the statewide Recreational Fishing Survey Results to guide any further management

considerations for recreational fishers, the percentage take may be lower based on current data so it is not currently clear.

6. **TARFish supports the development of a harvest strategy for southern calamari that includes formal allocations for both sectors.**
7. **TARFish supports habitat restoration (seagrass) in the southeast of Tasmania**

Commercial Proposal Discussion

In regard to calamari and the issuing of licences, the Commercial sector was given a Ministerial directive in 2018 that any catch after that would not qualify fishers for a restricted licence in Northern Tasmania. However, the calamari fishery in the north remained unrestricted in catch limit, apart from a limited spawning closure. The commercial sector has fished it opportunistically hard taking two times the maximum sustainable yield (IMAS). The proposal for this fishery for the commercial sector does not necessarily restrain catch. Limited licences will make it more profitable for those with licences and from what we've seen in the south east a small number of fishers can be just as effective as a large number hitting a spawning bed - there is only so many fish to come off the bed.

It will reduce the number of commercial fishers, but no catch quota is planned. It is unlikely that the fishery will receive sufficient protection from the proposed commercial management.

Alternatives:

1. **Catch Cap (Total Allowable Catch)**

Excerpts from the Government's 2018 analysis of (Calamari) Management Tools

"There would be potential to use this option if the following tools were able to be utilised on a cost recovery basis:

1. *Telephone reporting — so that the Department would know which fishers were accessing the catch cap area and direct participating fishers to send their catch and effort returns to the Department within 48 hours of each fishing trip.*
2. *Priority data entry of all returns relating to the catch cap area.*
3. *Potential for the use of an electronic logbook — say a simple electronic form on a mobile device — that could be utilised to monitor catch and would enable data to be entered into FILMS without relying on Fisheries Monitoring staff to manually enter the data. However, there would be a cost to develop this.*

This report was published in 2018. It is now 2023 and TARFish seeks to understand what work or investment, if any, has been undertaken or made in consideration of the necessary sustainability improvements this option may provide?

2. **Quota (non-transferrable)**

This could be used in conjunction with a TAC. This would limit further effort increase which is identified as an outcome being sought by government. It would also provide certainty to quota holder/operator fishers.

3. **Limit commercial take pre-spawning**

The recreational sector typically catches calamari post spawning. TARFish is concerned that commercial effort is targeting aggregations pre-spawning which may be having a disproportionate effect on recruitment. Capping pre-spawning take by the commercial sector

would improve recruitment. Alternatively or additionally, extending closure could be a strategy to achieve this.

4. Use of technology to support greater flexibility in commercial management

Since 2018, NRE has invested at least \$4m in digital transformation of commercial fisheries management. It would seem logical to implement those improvements for the commercial Scalefish sector (if not already) to facilitate a TAC, pre-spawning catch cap and electronic logbooks.

Harvest Strategy

- Given the importance to both sectors, we recommend the government prioritise a Harvest Strategy inclusive of allocation arrangements for both sectors.

Recreational Discussion

Recreational catch

- Southern Calamari is **typically taken equally by shore-based and boat-based fishers**. With limited shore-based fishing opportunities those with lower capacity to fish from a boat, including those with lower incomes and reduced mobility may be disproportionately affected noting that there are limited shore-based fishing opportunities for other key species, particularly those that fish for consumption.
- Recreational fishers use of the fishery is predominantly in December- January followed by February-March and April – May. This is largely after the peak spawning season for calamari, suggesting that recreational fishers are likely having a lower impact on population spawning potential.
- 35% of calamari is taken recreationally (2017-18 Lyle pp27).

TARFish recently supported the extension to the calamari spawning closure on the basis it should provide sufficient protection of spawning biomass and therefore contributing to stock resilience and reduced risk of biomass falling to low levels.

On balance, the calamari proposals for recreational fishers appear to be overly punitive and may not reduce commercial catch. It is a potential consequence of the proposals, that a reduced recreational catch will support the commercial sector fishing at current levels. That is to say, without effective control/limit on commercial catch (licencing is no guarantee) it is difficult to justify that a significant bag limit reduction for the recreational sector will achieve any substantial resource benefit.

Flathead

Introduction

Sand flathead is the most important recreational species - bar none, representing 70% of all recreationally caught fish each year.

Many fishers have conveyed increasing difficulty in catching “sized” flathead.

The fishery has been rated as “depleting” for many years with only one change to management in 2015 which was an increase in the size limit.

The fishery has now been rated as depleted in the most recent scalefish assessment.

The State Government announced interim changes to management when releasing the proposed Scalefish rule changes – for recreational fishers, an increase of the size limit from 32 to 35cm and a bag reduction from 20 to 10. And for commercial fishers, an increase in size limit from 32 to 35cm and banning of commercial flathead take from Frederick Henry and Norfolk Bays. They are expected to be in place until the new Scalefish fishery rules come into effect on 1 November 2023.

The Minister’s precautionary approach is responsible, and also sets a precedent in fisheries management in Tasmania.

The release of the peer reviewed stock assessment has not yet occurred however TARFish notes that the Minister has taken onboard TARFish’s advice to have it scrutinised through a scientifically rigorous peer review process.

TARFish also notes that an extensive IMAS study into recreational flathead fishers has been undertaken but the results have not been released publicly at this time. It was expected to be released in May 2023.

TARFish welcomes the recent commitment of \$1m over two years (\$500,000 p.a.) for sand flathead recovery in the recent State Budget announcement.

Government proposal

Recreational

1. Size limits

Increase the minimum size from 32 to 35cm

Introduce a maximum size limit of 38cm in the southern region and 40cm in other waters

2. Catch limits

Limits	Current	Southern region*	Bass Strait Islands and Other Waters
Bag limit	20 fish	2 fish	5 fish
Possession limit	30 fish	10 fish	10 fish

*Cape Pillar west to Whale Head, including Frederick Henry and Norfolk Bays



Commercial

1. Size limits

Increase the minimum size from 32 to 35cm

Introduce a maximum size limit of 38cm in the southern region and 40cm in other waters

2. Catch limits

Licence	Current	Proposed (per day)
For holders of a scalefish licence (excluding rock lobster)	No limit	25 kg (sand flathead)
For holders of a rock lobster licence	30 fish (combined flathead limit)	10 kg (sand flathead)* 20 kg (other flathead species)*

Further information needed to inform advice

TARFish remains concerned that it does not have sufficient information on which to base its position on the proposals. TARFish accepts in broad terms that the stock assessment indicates serious concern for sand flathead stocks and notes the release of the IMAS advice regarding sand flathead during the consultation period. but remains concerned that other supporting information on which to evaluate the proposed management changes is lacking.

Specifically, there is limited information on potential recovery times or impact of the proposed bag changes and size limit proposals singly or collectively. This makes it very difficult to suggest how potential changes could be implemented (if needed) and over what period.

TARFish considers the following information should be put in the public domain as a matter of urgency

- The IMAS sand flathead research project results
- Any consideration for proposed rule changes on supporting industry including tackle stores and regional communities.

TARFish requests the opportunity to further refine or amend its position when additional information becomes available including the departmental advice document and prior to the decision of the Minister.

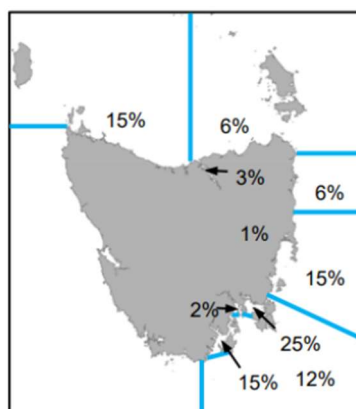
Position on interim management

[TARFish's draft positions](#) on the proposed changes were released publicly in the early part of the consultation period. Included was TARFish's view that the Minister's precautionary approach in introducing interim management arrangements is responsible and also sets a precedent for applying the precautionary principle in fisheries management in Tasmania.

TARFish supported the increase in size limit from 32 to 35 cm and a bag limit reduction to 10 as a precautionary approach.

Recreational catch

Around 80 per cent of recreational flathead catch is taken from the East and Southeast Coasts of Tasmania, with the most significant catches occurring in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and Norfolk-Frederick Henry Bays. Only 20% of recreational sand flathead is from the north coast.



Proportion (%) of the total catch (numbers) by fishing region during 2017-18. Includes kept and released fish.

Source: [2017-18 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania](#).

Fishery independent survey

Since 2012, a fishery independent survey has been conducted following concern for sand flathead stocks. The survey focussed on D'Entrecasteaux Channel, Norfolk Bay and Frederick Henry Bay, and Great Oyster Bay (SEC).

Ongoing concerns lead to an associated expansion of surveys from 2021 to Stanley, Bridport and Tamar (NC) and St Helens and Mercury Passage (EC). In 2023 it was further expanded to Flinders Island.

Consultation outcomes

Throughout the consultation period, TARFish has been engaging directly with recreational fishers to seek their views on the proposed changes and it was evident that there is clear regionality of the views and fishing experience for sand flathead.

The feedback from fishers has been instructive in reaching TARFish's position. Generally, TARFish found that:

1. Sand flathead remains the most important recreational fish to recreational fishers and that recreational fishing is a significant part of their way of life.
2. The vast majority of fishers acknowledge that action is required to support the fishery with the majority supporting the interim management arrangements.
3. There are regional differences in recreational fishing experience for sand flathead with fishers on the north and east coast reporting less concern with the state of the fishery based on their personal fishing experience.
4. There are high levels of distrust that access (relaxation of management) will be returned to recreational fishers making them less receptive to more restrictive short-term management for rapid stock recovery.
5. Management controls are seen as punitive or inconsistent with personal experience of the fishery and may result in reduced compliance with very restrictive management settings.
6. There is a pervasive view that current enforcement of rules is:
 - a. Very low and not visible
 - b. Not sufficiently punitive
7. There is an enduring belief that the commercial sector is a major contributor to the problems with the sand flathead fishery.
8. There is concern that marine farming may be impacting sand flathead.
9. There is limited (low) support for landing fish whole or returning with frames for a variety of reasons including:
 - a. Not returning the frames from approximately where they are caught;
 - b. Putting waste into landfill unnecessarily;
 - c. Contamination of fish waste with other forms of waste such as household waste;
 - d. Attracting unwanted species to boat ramps/where fish are landed such as seagulls and other birds, sharks and stingrays; and
 - e. The smell.

Principles guiding TARFish position

It has been extremely challenging for TARFish to develop a specific position on sand flathead, particularly given the absence of some key information, such as the peer review of the stock assessment and the IMAS study into recreational sand flathead fishers.

Importantly, [TARFish's Rules \(2020\)](#), set out our objects and purposes. Together with the consultation feedback, they have guided the Board's position. The specific objects are shown below:

- to represent the interests of recreational fishers and recreational fishing industry Associates in communication with government, industry, research and community organizations;
- to promote the wise use and conservation of fish stocks and habitat; and
- to promote research to increase knowledge of fish habits, the environmental and other issues pertaining to the recreational fishery.

TARFish has framed its position on the following:

1. Returning the fishery to a minimum safe level of 20% biomass
2. Applying management where research indicates it is required (a regional approach)
3. Seeking certainty on return of access
4. Minimising the impact on recreational fishing reliant businesses
5. Supporting new and novel approaches to stock enhancement for sand flathead
6. Seeking complimentary management and investment to support recreational fishing during the recovery period
7. Supporting research (and how it is communicated to recreational fishers) that improves our understanding of sand flathead stocks and its recovery
8. Supporting investment and action on fisher-led stewardship for sand flathead

Commercial discussion

Whilst the commercial take of sand flathead is low, it is taken in a part of the fishery that is most heavily fished recreationally (Storm Bay) and may also be having a flow-on effect to the D'Entrecasteaux Norfolk-Fredrick Henry Bay.

In this context, a return of 2-4 tonne from the commercial sector may facilitate faster stock recovery.

Research and modelling

- TARFish supports additional research to support better understanding of the stock and recovery pathways to support a recovery plan.

Stock enhancement

- TARFish strongly supports further investigation of stock enhancement opportunities for sand flathead. Whilst appreciating that some research into dusky flathead suggests that it may be of limited effect for biomass recovery, TARFish suggests that the investigation should be expanded with novel and new opportunities further explored that considers how the flathead population "stunting" could be more quickly reversed for example through selective breeding of faster growing fish to aid reversal of Fisher Induced Evolution (FIE).

Stewardship

- TARFish has been an advocate for fisher-led stewardship programs for some time and strongly supports the implementation of a stewardship program for sand flathead.
- Stewardship programs like the world-renowned Tuna Champions (delivered from Tasmania by the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)), shows that stewardship programs can and must play a role in Tasmanian fisheries going forward – with programs developed by recreational fishers for recreational fishers.

TARFish position

The priority for TARFish is for maintaining some access to the sand flathead fishery, particularly in the south east, and for a longer recovery period.

In broad terms TARFish accepts the science that indicates that significant change is required. In TARFish's experience, it is unusual for a group of scientists to prepare and submit advice in the absence of a high level of scientific certainty which adds weight to the concern they hold for the sand flathead fishery and the need for immediate action. This has been influential on the development of TARFish's position.

Timeline for recovery

The proposed settings are based on advice from IMAS which states, *"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."*

This includes a projected recovery to 40% biomass in 4-6 years.

TARFish does not support the assumption that a rapid recovery will support greater satisfaction.

TARFish's view is based on the recent experience of recreational fishers in Western Australia that advocated for a longer recovery period (20 years) and maintenance of access that had some flexibility e.g. trading off a lower bag limit for increased number of days the species can be fished.

The priority for TARFish is for maintaining reasonable access to the sand flathead fishery while accepting a longer recovery period.

Size limits

- **TARFish supports the increase in minimum size limit to 35cm for all regions**
- **TARFish supports the implementation of a maximum 40cm size limit for the east coast and south east**
 - Females of Southern sand flathead grow larger, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of fishing, a maximum size limit is expected to facilitate larger female fish being retained to aid stock recovery and reduce fisher-induced evolution (slower, smaller growing fish)
 - Retaining additional larger females will also support improved egg-production capacity.
- **TARFish does not support the proposed 38cm maximum size limit in the south-east**
 - The slot limit of 35-40cm will effectively constrain daily catches in many instances on the east and south east coasts.

Bag limits

North Coast

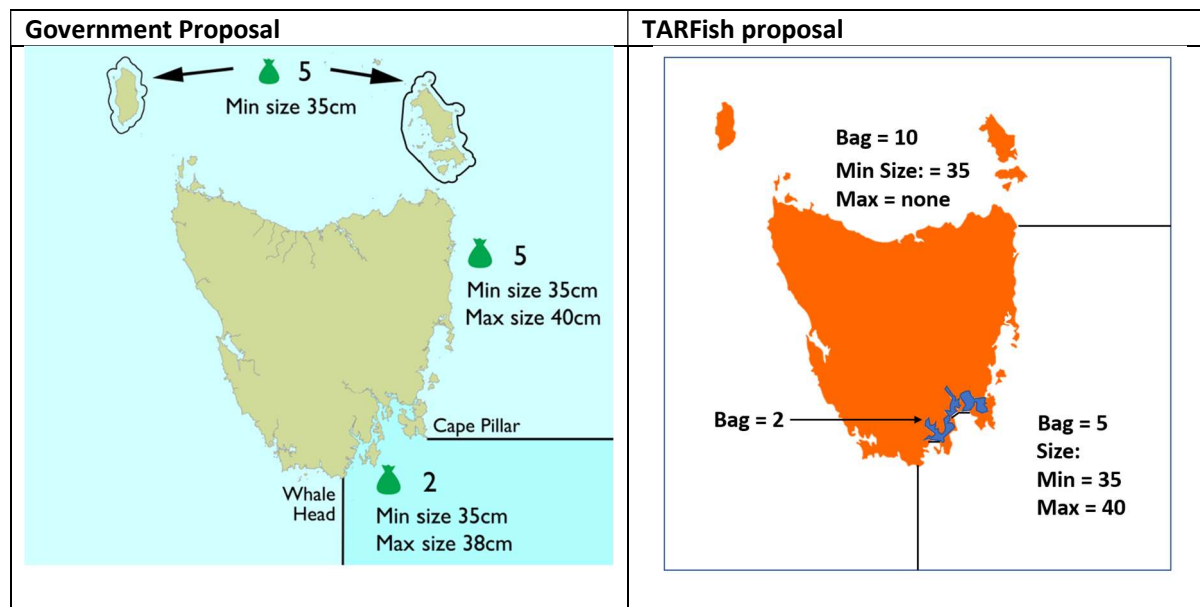
- **TARFish does not support the proposed bag limit of 5 in the north.**
- **TARFish proposes a bag limit of 10 in the north**
 - Only 15% of all recreationally caught fish come from the north coast
 - Additional data from the north coast is needed before any further reduction contemplated.
- TARFish does not support an upper size limit on the north coast.

East Coast and Southeast Coast

- **TARFish supports a bag limit of 5 for the East Coast and South East Coast (noting the exclusions below)**
- **TARFish does not support the current area proposed for the bag limit of 2 on the south east coast**

D’Entrecasteaux Channel and Norfolk-Frederick Henry Bays

- **TARFish supports a bag limit of 2 in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel, Norfolk Henry and Frederick Henry Bays only.**



Proposed landing requirements

- **TARFish does not support the proposed landing requirements that all flathead species be landed whole or as fillets with heads and frame.**
- **There are low levels of recreational fisher support for landing fish whole or returning with frames for a variety of reasons.**
- **TARFish supports a contemporary approach to catch monitoring and compliance and recommends app based logging of catches (compulsory catch reporting).** This would require a photo to be taken of each fish and retained within the app. To ensure compliance with size, a measure would be required to be used. This would need to be supplied to all fishers.
- TARFish notes the AFTA submission that highlights the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture (No81 2016) which found that licensing allows greater transparency and evidence based decision making and “contribute(s) to improved management..” and that’s its purpose is to “get a more comprehensive picture of activity” noting that “information gaps may not be critical when stocks are healthy but when the threat of over-fishing arises, good catch participation information leads to better responses and outcomes.” **TARFish does not support a broad based generalised rod and line licence but believes AFTA’s submission is worthy of consideration of the benefits that fisher registration (a no-cost to fisher option) may deliver.** TARFish accepts that this would impose an additional cost burden that could be met through using a proportion of the recently announced sand flathead funding.

- **TARFish recommends that the Better Fishing Funding could then be redirected to improving fishing opportunities for recreational fishers including but not limited to:**
 - **Increasing shore-based access for recreational fishers**
 - **Undertaking habitat restoration such as seagrass re-seeding and angasi reef restoration to increase overall fish productivity and therefore opportunity.**
- **TARFish supports dedicated investigation of stock enhancement opportunities and potential, particularly as it relates to rebuilding faster growing, larger fish (to reverse “stunting”)**
- **TARFish welcomes the additional funding for sand flathead of \$500,000 per year for two years but notes that the recovery of sand flathead is likely to take significantly longer (6+years) and additional funding will be required.**
- **TARFish supports increased compliance activities to ensure the highest protection for sand flathead.**
- **TARFish supports a complete ban on the commercial take of sand flathead.**
- **TARFish supports the implementation of a fisher-led stewardship program.**

Striped Trumpeter

Introduction

Striped trumpeter is in the top 5 recreationally caught fish targeted for consumption (an eating fish) with less than 10% of size fish released.

In 2017-18, 29 tonnes of Striped Trumpeter were retained by recreational fishers compared with the commercial sector with 14.2 tonnes the same year and reducing to 8.2 tonnes in 2020-21 (6.2 tonnes in commercial waters, 1.9 tonnes in commonwealth waters). An updated retained catch for the recreational sector is not currently available but is expected to be lower than the 29 tonnes taken in 2017-18 in line with the reduced commercial catch.

According to IMAS, striped trumpeter has high recruitment variability and there are significant stock risks with this species as a result.

The current minimum size limit is below the size at maturity.

Government proposals

Recreational

1. **Size limit:** Increase size limit from 55cm to 62cm for both male and female.
2. **Catch limits:**

Limits	Current statewide	Proposed Western	Proposed Eastern
Bag limit	4 fish	4 fish	2 fish
Possession limit	8 fish	8 fish	8 fish
Boat limit	20 fish	12 fish	6 fish

Commercial

1. **Size limit:** Increase size limit from 55cm to 62cm for both male and female.
2. **Catch limits:**

	Current Statewide	Proposed Western	Proposed Eastern
For holders of a scalefish licence (including a rock lobster licence)	250 kg (part of combined limit with snapper and yellowtail kingfish)	150 kg species limit	50 kg species limit
For Commonwealth licence holders	150 kg	50 kg	50 kg

Note: The Commonwealth Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF) have been subject to a trip limit of 150 kg for striped trumpeter since 2015. They do not currently recognise striped trumpeter minimum size limits, annual spawning closures, or the requirement to land the species whole or as fillets with heads and frames. Due to the ongoing assessment of striped trumpeter as a depleted stock NRE Tas is seeking complementary management arrangements with AFMA.

Impact of government proposals on recreational and commercial catches

Recreational

No modelled impact of the proposed changes has been provided. This information is needed to determine if the proposals are likely to have the desired effect and over what time frame.

It is unclear if the necessary stock protection and effort reduction will be provided by the size limit change alone.

IMAS agreed to model the impact of the proposed size limit change at RecFAC#82.

At the time of publishing, this information has not been made available to TARFish or RecFAC. However, TARFish is of the understanding that the impact of the size limit change alone could be as high as a 70% reduction on recreational take (this does not include the proposed further restriction on the bag limit) on the east and southeast coast fishery.

Charter boat operators

No modelled impact of the proposed changes on charter boat operators has been provided, the Sea Charter Boat Operators of Tasmania operators believe that there will be a 90% reduction in catch.

Commercial

According to NRE Tasmania, the potential impact on commercial catch if the proposals had been introduced 5 years ago is 6.7 tonnes in total or around 1.1 tonnes per year.

This means, the commercial sector would see a reduction of less than 10% in commercial catch.

TARFish position

- **The proposed size limit change and cuts to the bag, boat and possession limits may result in a perverse stock outcome from unintended consequences.**
- Whilst on face value, it would appear logical to increase the size limit to facilitate stock recovery, it may have the alternative effect of resulting in more fish being caught and then released with a correlating increase in post release mortality including that from seal predation.
- Similarly, a bag cut may appear to facilitate stock recovery but it does not account for fisher behaviour, by that we mean that fisher effort may be displaced to other offshore species such as Southern Bluefin Tuna or blue eye trevalla which may have flow on effects for those species.

- TARFish’s view is that the fisher effort change is likely to be minimal and the overall benefit to striped trumpeter highly uncertain.
- **Modelling for the proposed changes is critical in TARFish’s view to reach an informed position.**
- **TARFish therefore can only offer qualified support for the size limit change and will further refine its position once the modelling information is provided.**
- **TARFish strongly supports harmonisation of commonwealth management controls particularly as they relate to size and spawning closures and would not countenance any further restrictions on recreational catch until they are in place. TARFish is particularly concerned about commonwealth fishing of spawning fish during Tasmanian spawning closures. This is particularly relevant given the high recruitment variability for striped trumpeter**
- **TARFish requests the following monitoring and modelling:**
 - **Modelled impact of size limit change impact on recreational catch.**
 - **Modelled impact of the bag, possession and boat limits together with the size limit change.**
 - **Modelled impact of what proportion of release would occur as a result of increased size limit change (release of sub-legal fish).**
 - **Monitoring of seal predation on mortality.**

Risk of displaced effort

This is an iconic Tasmanian species that is typically targeted alongside other offshore fish such as Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) or blue-eye trevalla.

TARFish seeks to understand what modelling or consideration has been given to the impact of displaced effort (overall effort does not reduce).

Spawning Closure

Whilst not covered in the government’s proposal, the extension of the spawning closure could be considered.

Regional approach

TARFish notes that its advice to NRE (and supported by RecFAC#82) to consider a regional approach (east and west coast) has been adopted in the draft proposals.

Whilst TARFish does not support the current proposals based on the potential for perverse outcomes (an increase in incidental mortality due to fishing even with reduced bag limits – the minimum size limit effect), a regional approach that protects access for west coast fishers is welcomed should it be needed at a later date. TARFish specifically notes the importance of this fishery on the west coast noting the relatively limited fishing opportunities (due to weather) and species that are targeted/caught in that region.

Risk of social cost of management proposals

TARFish supports management settings that do not act as a “closure by proxy” for the fishery by reducing the bag and possession limits to such a low level as to prevent the activity or act as a barrier to participation.

Of particular concern to TARFish is the potential impact on group fishing and potential increased costs from a boat limit.

Striped trumpeter is a deep water fish, with fishing taking place from a boat, often far from the place of launching with multiple fishers on board. A boat limit could create a barrier to participation to fishers that are less likely to own a boat (by not being taken on a fishing trip if low boat limits are applied).

Charter boat fishery

Charter boat operators are concentrated on the East Coast. As they are considered a “fishing platform” recreational limits apply to individuals onboard, including boat limits. The proposed changes to the east coast bag/boat and possession limits, may have a significant impact on charter boat operators.

It would seem logical to extend the proposal to extend boat limits for charter operators for southern bluefin tuna, yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna to striped trumpeter should the proposed boat limit come into effect.

Commonwealth commercial fishery

Commonwealth Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF) do not currently recognise striped trumpeter minimum size limits, annual spawning closures, or the requirement to land the species whole or as fillets with heads and frames.

The absence of harmonised management controls including minimum size and spawning closures may be having a disproportionate effect on stock productivity.

Risk of increased mortality from seal predation

TARFish recognises that an unintended consequence of increasing the size limit may be an increase in seal predation and an associated decrease in post-release survival rates. It may be that an increase in size limit will result in more fish being sought to achieve the bag limit and hence more fish being caught and released and resultant increase in seal predation and therefore an increase in overall mortality.

TARFish supports increased monitoring of seal predation and that clear guidance is provided to recreational fishers regarding best practice to minimise predation.

Bastard Trumpeter

Introduction

For recreational fishers, bastard trumpeter is predominantly caught by gillnetting. One-third of all fish caught in recreational gillnets is bastard trumpeter. The Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery: Ecological Risk Assessment (Lyle, 2016) indicated that recreational use of gillnets was very high risk to bastard trumpeter.

The Government has committed to phasing out gillnetting by 2030 with a suite of proposed changes included in these proposed rule changes with intended implementation in 2023.

Bastard Trumpeter are estimated to reach maturity at 50cm. The current size limit is 38cm.

Recreational catch is estimated at 3.4 tonnes per annum in 2017-18 and the commercial catch at 4.3 tonnes the same year and 5.9 tonnes (5.4 tonnes from east coast) in 2020-21.

Government proposal

Recreational

1. **Size limit:** Increase minimum size limit from 38cm to 42 cm.
2. **Catch limits:**

Limits	Current	Proposed Western	Proposed Eastern
Bag limit	5 fish	5 fish	2 fish
Possession limit	10 fish	10 fish	10 fish
Boat limits	No limit	15 fish	6 fish

Commercial

1. **Size limit:** Increase minimum size limit from 38cm to 42 cm.
2. **Catch limits:**

Licence	Current	Proposed Western	Proposed Eastern
Holders of a scalefish licence (excluding rock lobster)	200 kg	150 kg	50 kg
Holders of a rock lobster licence	30 fish	30 kg (statewide)*	

Impact of government proposals on recreational and commercial catches

Recreational

The proposed gillnetting changes together with a size limit change are likely to have the effect of reducing recreational take significantly, effectively closing the fishery by proxy to recreational fishers.

TARFish believes that justification for the size limit increase is required since it would appear to achieve little towards recovery. Catch reduction in real terms maybe more effective and phase out of nets and short-term changes to net fishing practices are likely to be reasonably effective.

Commercial

According to NRE Tasmania, the potential impact on commercial catch if the proposals had been introduced 5 years ago is 1.3 tonnes in total (or 250-300kg per annum) in the eastern region with no other impact outside of the eastern region.

This equates to less than 10% reduction per annum.

TARFish position

- **TARFish offers qualified support for the size limit increase from 38cm to 42cm noting concern that it will make little contribution towards stock recovery.**
- TARFish participated in the Government's recreational gillnetting working group and noted the inclusion of proposed changes to gillnetting in the package of management control changes. Specifically:
 - Reduction in soak time from 6 hours to 2 hours.
 - Limits on depth (20m) and distance from shore (250m).

- Attending nets in shark refuge areas.
- **The proposed gillnetting changes together with the size limit change are likely to have the effect of reducing recreational take significantly** and therefore the need to impose bag possession and boat limits in the immediate term seems overly punitive and unnecessary.
- **Therefore, TARFish does not support the proposed bag, boat and possession limits as proposed.**
- **The impact of the proposed changes to the commercial sector is minimal and it is unclear why the commercial sector should be overly advantaged in this shared fishery.**

Size limit not sufficient to protect stock replacement

Both the current (38cm) and proposed (42cm) size limit does not protect stock replacement let alone rebuild and is not a sustainable setting.

Estimated size at maturity is greater than 45cm and more likely around 50cm.

Commonwealth fishery

Bastard trumpeter are known as by-catch in the commonwealth shark fishery. TARFish believes that the by-catch from this fishery should be considered.

Southern Garfish

Introduction

Southern Garfish are rated as a depleted stock, showing no signs of recovery in the last five years. Anecdotally, a number of marine scientists have indicated concern with the stock assessment and that more research was required to accurately assess the stock.

Recreational fishers are estimated to have caught 300kg in 2017/18 compared with commercial catches of around 10t (17 tonnes in 2020-21). Commercial catch has been increasing each year over the last three years.

Seasonal spawning closures have been in place in the commercial fishery since 2009, prompted by declining catches. Spawning closures for the recreational sector were introduced in 2023.

There have been no other commercial constraints (management controls) to limit garfish landings since the fishery has been rated as depleted.

The issues with stock recovery are unlikely to be exclusively the result of fishing pressure but that environmental factors such as warming water and habitat change are also likely to be impacting southern garfish.

TARFish has a published position on [southern garfish](#) that was informed by recreational fisher feedback.

Government Proposal

Recreational

Limits	Current	Proposed
Bag limit	15 fish	10 fish
Possession limit	30 fish	20 fish
Boat limit	No limit	30 fish

Commercial

Licence	Current	Proposed
Holders of a scalefish licence (excluding a rock lobster licence)	No limit	300 kg
Holders of a rock lobster licence	20 kg	No change

Impact of government proposals on recreational and commercial catches

Recreational

The proposed bag, possession and boat limit have not been modelled, however, given the recreational take of this species is ~300kg per annum, the changes appear punitive without any demonstration of improvement to stock recovery and sustainability.

Commercial

According to NRE Tasmania, the potential impact on commercial catch if the proposals had been introduced 5 years ago is 5.3 tonnes in total (or 1 tonne per annum).

This equates to less than 5% reduction per annum on current commercial landings.

TARFish Position

- **TARFish does not support the proposed changes to bag and possession limits for recreational fishers on the basis that they will have little or no impact on stock recovery:**
 - given the recreational take is extremely low; and
 - a spawning closure was recently introduced.
- **TARFish suggests that the benefit of the spawning closure should be assessed before any further restrictions on the recreational sector are contemplated.**
- **TARFish supports additional restrictions on the commercial sector to limit total landings of Southern Garfish.**
- **TARFish does not believe the proposed commercial limits will sufficiently constrain commercial catches to facilitate stock recovery and notes that commercial catch has increased each year over the last three years.**
- **TARFish further notes that the issues with stock recovery are unlikely to be exclusively the result of fishing pressure but that environmental factors such as warming water and habitat change are also likely to be impacting southern garfish.**
- **TARFish supports further research to assess southern garfish populations**

Jackass Morwong

Introduction

Jackass morwong is currently rated as “sustainable” in the most recent Tasmanian Wild Fisheries Assessments (released December 2022). Commonwealth assessments concluded that Jackass Morwong stocks were Overfished from 2008 to 2010, but stocks have since been classified as Sustainable (Patterson et al. 2021). The offshore commonwealth fishery has been rated by the CSIRO as depleted for the eastern stock only. The Government’s *Public Consultation Paper 2023* is misleading regarding the stock status of this fishery.

It is unclear why any management changes are necessary when the current Tasmanian stock assessment has rated this fishery as sustainable.

Abundance of Jackass Morwong is low in Tasmanian waters and, as such, the species is not actively targeted by commercial fishers in Tasmania but landed as a by-product of gillnetting.

Jackass Morwong is an important recreational fishery. Recreational catch is predominantly line caught with some gillnetting.

Government Proposals

Recreational

Limits	Current	Proposed
Bag limit	10 fish	10 fish
Possession limit	20 fish	20 fish
Boat limit	No limit	30 fish

Commercial

Licence	Current	Proposed
Holders of a scalefish licence (except holders of a rock lobster licence)	No limit	300 kg
Holders of a rock lobster licence	60 fish	40 kg

Note: Proposed ban on spearfishing

TARFish Position

- **Given the low level of take by the recreational sector and that the current stock status is “sustainable” there is no pressing need for additional management controls.**
- **TARFish notes the planned changes to gillnetting management settings are likely to have an impact on recreational take from 2023 onwards.**
- **TARFish recommends that there is no urgency and a watching brief should be maintained to assess the impact of changes to gillnetting requirements and potential management impacts on sand flathead and striped trumpeter (in terms of species switching) before applying any further management controls.**

Phase out of Recreational Gillnetting

Government Proposal

The Tasmanian government has committed to phasing out gillnetting by 2030.

The government is proposing to Introduce stronger gillnetting requirements:

- Reduce soak time from 6 to 2 hours.
- Requiring recreational nets set in Shark Refuge Areas to be attended by the licence holder at all times.
- Prohibiting the use of recreational gill nets in waters greater than 20 metres in depth.
- Prohibit the use of recreational gillnets in waters further than 250 metres from the high-water mark.
- Prohibit the take of all Maugean skate in Macquarie Harbour as well as the taking or possessing of any other skate, ray or stingray.

Introduction

In October 2020, TARFish made a submission in response to the Tasmanian Government's Discussion Paper "Towards a 10-year vision for recreational sea fishing in Tasmania". The position TARFish took at that time is shown below.

"It is important to balance the need to reduce high impact fishing methods with their cultural importance. A good example of this is gill netting. Changes to mesh sizes, set-time and areas have already reduced the impact of this fishing method. In addition, gillnetting is waning as a preferred fishing method as indicated by declining licences. This would indicate the overall impact of the activity has been reduced markedly in recent years. Any further changes need to consider the relative impact of further changes or bans. One option that may be useful to consider is to grandfather existing licences and cease issuing new licences. This would facilitate the gradual phase out of the activity without disadvantaging those that continue to practice it. Alternatively, a 10-year lead time that sees the practice of gill-netting cease in 2030.

In 2020, a survey of over 3200 recreational fishers was undertaken to understand community attitudes to a raft of potential measures that were being considered for the Tasmanian Government's Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy. Responses to a proposal to assess "whether high impact recreational fishing methods such as gillnetting should be allowed" received 66% approval (and 17% disapproval). Of the 106 written responses accompanying the questionnaire, 94 called for the complete banning of nets while only 5 respondents opposed a ban.

TARFish participated in the Government's gillnetting working group in 2022 and supported the consensus position that "Grandfather licensing followed by mandatory attendance and soak time rules, ultimately leading to... a complete phase out by 2030."

TARFish supported the position on the basis that mandatory attendance and soak times were consistent with best practice. TARFish also offered to undertake fisher consultation regarding gillnetting to gauge preferred options for phase out however this offer was declined by the government. As a result, TARFish has limited insight into the views and wants of Tasmania's gillnet fishers aside from the response to the 2020 survey.

In terms of impact on fish, Lyle et al (2014) assert that gillnetting in Tasmania has had demonstrable impacts on the populations of Bastard Trumpeter and Blue Warehou.

The impacts – actual and potential – of recreational gillnetting on inshore fish stocks have direct implications for the quality of fishing opportunities available for line fishers (and spear fishers). It is likely that Tasmanian gillnetting activities spanning more than two centuries have had a major impact on inshore community fish composition, in particular net-vulnerable target species such as Bastard Trumpeter, Long-snouted Boarfish and Banded Morwong. It is also likely that ongoing netting activity has contracted the range of Striped Trumpeter to deeper reefs – the species was once commonly caught in shallow inshore reefs around the Tasmanian coastline (Bridge, 2007). Recent reports of deep-water recreational gillnetting (up to 80 m) targeting Striped Trumpeter are also concerning, particularly given the potential barotrauma of released fish and additional impacts of lost (ghost) nets.

The establishment of emerging species such as King George Whiting, Yellowtail Kingfish and Pink Snapper may be impacted by the use of gillnets. An example highlighting these concerns is the targeting of snapper in Norfolk Bay in recent years by gillnetters, often through illegal night sets (A. Pender, pers. comm.). While snapper continue to establish a population in the bay, they appear to occupy a small number of highly localised shallow reef sites in their seasonal movements (Wolfe, 2021). These sites, and the time they are occupied by snapper, are well known to IMAS, and increasingly to the recreational fishing community. Supporting the establishment of these species could help address a current lack of shore-based fishing opportunities and provide reliable alternatives to catching depleting/depleted species such as Sand Flathead and Southern Calamari.

Macquarie Harbour

An interim emergency management order is currently in place Macquarie Harbour, the proposal for gillnetting in Macquarie Harbour will formalise an existing order into rules.

TARFish Position

- **TARFish notes the intention to phase out gillnetting by 2030 which aligns with TARFish’s position.**
- **TARFish supports the proposed gillnet rule changes** on the basis:
 - It will provide better protection for Bastard Trumpeter and Blue Warehou and Striped Trumpeter.
 - It will provide some protection for emerging species such as snapper.
 - It may improve inshore fishing opportunities for line fishing.
 - It improves fishing practice.
 - There is broad support for the phase out of gillnetting amongst recreational fishers.
- **TARFish supports efforts to protect the endangered Maugean Skate.**
- **TARFish does not support the proposed additional restrictions for Jackass Morwong (introduction of a boat limit) or Bastard Trumpeter (cuts to bag, possession and boat limits) as the proposed gillnet restrictions are considered sufficient to protect the stock.**

Other proposals

Vessel monitoring systems

TARFish supports formalising the ability to require Scalefish licence holder to have a VMS device fitted and operating whilst on a fishing trip into the Scalefish rules.

TARFish strongly supports the intention to direct all Danish seine vessels to install and operate VMS, particularly in view of the current concern regarding sand flathead stocks.

Charter Fishery

The Sea Charter Boat Operators of Tasmania (SCBOOT) are a TARFish foundation member organisation. TARFish has sought the views of the proposed changes from SCBOOT and supports the concerns expressed by SCBOOT in response to the proposed changes, specifically:

Charter boat tuna boat limit

The introduction of a boat limit of 6 for combined tuna species will result in an effective decrease in the boat limit.

Under the present arrangement, by exemption, larger charter boats are allowed 1 tuna per paying customer. The proposed change will limit them to 6 fish. SCBOOT believe this to unfairly disadvantage the larger boats taking in excess of 4 anglers. The expected impact of the change is a loss in boat charter days for larger operators. TARFish notes SCBOOTS view that on many trips more than six fish are not caught but there is a customer expectation that they can catch and keep one fish each. SCBOOT maintains that the existing exemption arrangements be formalised under the new Scalefish rules.

Registration

TARFish's view differs from SCBOOT's with regard to registration.

TARFish supports registration and mandatory catch returns to ensure the catch can be measured.

TARFish qualifies its support for registration and catch reporting on the following basis:

1. That registration fees do not impose a significant cost burden on charter operators
2. That the government acknowledge the valuable role charter boat operators play in promoting the Tasmanian brand – both to Tasmanians and visitors to the state. Noting the comments by SCBOOT in relation to the current state of the sector, it would be reasonable for Tourism Tasmania to be tasked with developing a specific strategy for recreational fishing tourism and promotion of sea charter boat operators. This may have the effect of supporting existing operators, facilitating succession planning, and growing the financial return to sector operators.

Striped trumpeter

TARFish supports SCBOOT's view that the proposed size limit will depress catch significantly with their operators indicating that less than 10% of striped trumpeter will exceed the size limit. As a result, it is likely to impact all charter operators that target stripey leading to lost charter days and/or increased focus on southern bluefin tuna.

Australian sardines

TARFish acknowledges the recently released stock assessments for sardines in the Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2020/21 which states:

“Australian Sardine in Tasmanian waters represent a proportion of the South-eastern Sardine stock, which is shared by three jurisdictions: Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales. Research indicates that the spawning biomass of the South-eastern Sardine stock in 2019 may have exceeded 200,000 t (Ward et al. 2022) and that there is potential for development of a large-scale fishery for Australian Sardine in Tasmanian waters (Ward and Gardner 2022).”

The information contained in the Scalefish Fishery Rules Review (Public Consultation Paper) provides insufficient information on the Government’s intent for a sardine fishery let alone developmental fishery management plan.

TARFish has not been engaged on this fishery at any time in the lead up to the Scalefish Fishery Rules Review. Without any necessary background it appears precipitous at best to be proposing rule changes for this fishery.

TARFish therefore does not support the proposed rule change.

TARFish position

TARFish does not support the proposed rule change for Australian Sardines on the basis there is no fishery developmental fishery management plan or other information provided on the intent for this fishery. Further, that TARFish has not been engaged on this fishery at any time in the lead up to the Scalefish Fishery Rules Review. Without any necessary background it appears precipitous at best to be proposing rule changes for this fishery.

TARFish therefore does not support the proposed rule change.

TARFish encourages the department to consult with the recreational sector, through TARFish, prior to any rule changes and preparation of a developmental fishery management plan given its strong interest in small pelagics, their relationship with other recreationally targeted species, and previous issues with small pelagics. To not approach this potentially highly contentious fishery in a staged, precautionary and consultative way increases the risk to social acceptance.

Reporting

The proposed rule change could effectively mean mandatory reporting for all recreational fishing. TARFish does not support such a board-based rule change.

Specifically, TARFish only supports the use of mandatory catch reporting for recreationally licensed fishers (e.g. rock lobster) and only when a fishery is rated as depleting or depleted.

Without any information or guidance about the potential application of this rule, TARFish does not support it and it is unnecessary at this time.

This section should be read in conjunction with TARFish’s position on sand flathead catch reporting and fisher registration.