

Sand Flathead insights*

Fishers helping shape

Sand Flathead stock recovery

* Survey conducted prior to any management changes implemented in 2023.

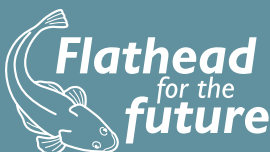


UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

IMAS



Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies



SUPPORTED BY

**Tasmanian
Government**

The fishers

The Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies surveyed Tasmania's Sand Flathead fishers from Feb to Apr 2023 to better understand their views on flathead stock status and management. This was used to inform the management actions in 2023 and strategies that better engage the community about the status of the fishery and their role in recovering the fishery.

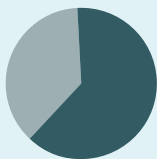
Almost **1,500 fishers** were surveyed.

Most respondents were **males** aged from **45–74**, with **79%** having over **20 years' experience** fishing for flathead in Tasmania.

83% of respondents placed a high importance on fishing compared with other recreational activities, while **77%** placed a high importance on Sand Flathead fishing compared to other target species. Almost **90%** mostly fish for Sand Flathead from a boat.

This brochure is a summary of the survey results.

63%



of respondents believe the Sand Flathead stock is in a **poor** to **very poor** condition

Fisher insights

- Five of the six regions where the stock was reported as being in the **poorest condition** were from the **south east**
- The **north and west coast regions** were considered in the **least poor** condition, although is still assessed as depleted (Krueck et al. 2024)

considered to have the least poor stock condition

considered to have the poorest stock condition

- **51%** were not satisfied with the **number** of flathead caught
- **62%** were not satisfied with the **size** of flathead caught



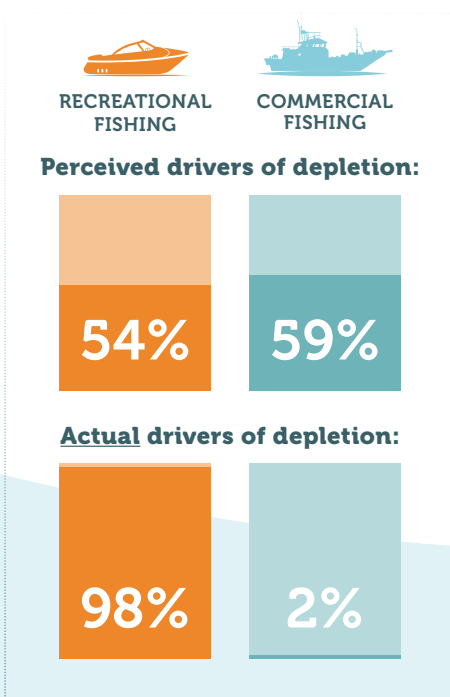
There was a strong correlation between increased satisfaction of respondents when they catch more fish, and particularly larger fish.

Improving the stock will increase fisher satisfaction

Perceived causes of Sand Flathead depletion

● **59%** believe commercial fishing is having the greatest impact on Sand Flathead stocks, compared to **54%** ranking recreational fishing as the biggest impact. This perception is at odds with the actual drivers of decline as reported through previous commercial fishing landings and statistical survey derived estimates of recreational catch. These data sources show that recreational fishing catches 98% of Sand Flathead and the remainder taken by commercial fishing. This mis-perception is likely leading to a lower acceptance of the need to further regulate the recreational fishery.

● **41%** think marine farming is having a major impact, followed by environmental factors (**19%**) and climate change (**11%**).



Value of Sand Flathead and perceived impacts of change for recreational fishers

● **81%** highly value the Sand Flathead fishing experience

● **91%** believe consumption of this species is highly important

● **30%** indicated that they wouldn't go fishing if they couldn't catch flathead

● **48%** said being unable to catch Sand Flathead due to depleted stock was a greater personal 'impact' than not being able to catch fish due to low bag or boat limits (**29%**) and size limit changes (**25%**)

Opinions on further depletion of Sand Flathead stock:

● Around **50%** of respondents agreed this would have a medium to high impact on the fishing experience and ecosystems in Tasmania

● **25%** thought it would have an impact on the Tasmanian economy

● **20%** thought it would impact their mental health

Management of the recreational fishery for Sand Flathead and rule compliance

84% agreed that swift and appropriate management is required for a sustainably managed fishery

59% agreed that most recreational fishers comply with fishing rules

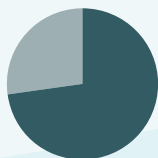
54% think that fishers do the right thing to ensure fish stocks are healthy

68% agreed that fisheries data should be collected by the government or an affiliated agency, but 46% also said data should be collected by an independent recreational fishing organisation

63% thought the daily bag limit of 20 per person was too high or much too high

65% believed that the previous minimum size limit for Sand Flathead of 32cm was about right

73%



supported **increased compliance checks** by police to enforce recreational fishing rules

swift and appropriate management is required

84%

the daily bag limit is too high

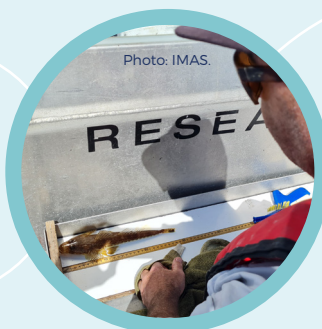
63%



Photo: Tasmania Police



Photo: IMAS



Stewardship and responsible fishing behaviours

There was good evidence that fishers were willing to support responsible fishing practices.

53%

agreed asking recreational fishers to voluntarily reduce catches could assist flathead stock recovery

While flathead fishing,

85%

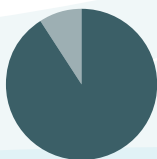
use de-hookers, and

70%

use circle hooks



92%



were **willing to educate** family, friends, and other fishers on recreational fishing rules

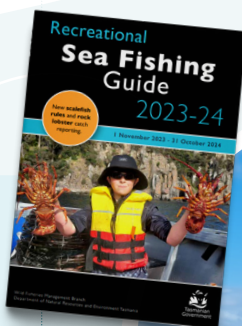


Photo: IMAS.



Photo: NRE Tas.



The full report is available here:



Alternate species to reduce pressures on Sand Flathead:

Good



These species are considered popular amongst fishers who target them and are considered 'sustainable'. Access to these fish usually requires a boat as some are only available offshore, so make sure you consider safe boating when targeting them.

TIGER FLATHEAD 63% highly valued catching and 74% valued eating



BLUE EYE TREVALLA 44% highly valued catching and 60% valued eating



SOUTHERN BLUEFIN TUNA 49% highly valued catching and 40% valued eating



While these fish are currently less popular, they're all considered 'sustainable' and are good alternatives to enjoy catching and/or eating when handled and prepared well. These species can be caught from shore or by boat:

AUSTRALIAN SALMON 41% to catch and 34% to eat



BLACK BREAM 25% to catch and 16% to eat



OCEAN PERCH or **GURNARD** 16% to catch and 26% to eat



MACKEREL 16% to catch and 15% to eat



MULLET 13% to catch and 13% to eat



Freshwater species such as trout are also a good alternative target species for those that might want to try their hand at freshwater fishing. Check out the Inland Fisheries Service website ifs.tas.gov.au.

Climate warming species



The below fish are popular among fishers who target them, for both the experience and eating, and are a good alternative to Sand Flathead that can be caught from shore or by boat. Numbers are predicted to increase in Tasmania as our coastal waters continue to warm. However, there's still much to learn about these species in Tasmania and how much fishing pressure they can endure. Make sure you're aware of regulations and consider how many you need to keep.

YELLOWTAIL KINGFISH 53% highly valued catching and 56% valued eating



KING GEORGE WHITING 49% highly valued catching and 60% valued eating



SNAPPER 48% highly valued catching and 56% valued eating



Think twice



The following species are popular recreational species but are either in a 'depleting' or 'depleted' state. While these species can still be enjoyed, make sure you only take what you need for a feed.

SOUTHERN CALAMARI 73% highly valued catching and 82% valued eating



STRIPED TRUMPETER 56% highly valued catching and 69% valued eating

