

## Getting It Right For Recreational Southern Calamari

Catching calamari, whether from a jetty or from a boat, is a popular activity for fishers and their families right around Tasmania.

A great quality eating fish, most fishers keep their catch. The most recent Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) Survey of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania notes the increasing importance of this fishery to recreational fishers over the last twenty years because of increased awareness of its eating qualities.

It is an extremely important recreational fishery with around a third of all calamari caught in Tasmanian waters taken by recreational fishers. The remaining two thirds is taken by the commercial sector.

Unfortunately, the Southern Calamari (calamari) stock has been assessed as depleting and that *"the current level of fishing mortality is likely to cause the stock to become recruitment impaired"* according to the Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS).

Driven in large part by commercial fishing that has targeted fishing spawning aggregations across northern Tasmania and total catches that exceed the estimated maximum sustainable yield in recent years mean that calamari are in trouble.

The Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2018-19 (the Assessment (2018-19)) states that *"The North coast region is of particular concern... 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, IMAS have indicated there is a similar pattern of overfishing risks to that experienced in the south-east fishery several decades ago and that the south-east spawning aggregations appear to have largely dispersed.

We all want abundant fisheries and TARFish supports efforts to reduce fishing pressure on Southern Calamari to ensure that, at a minimum, it returns to a "sustainable" stock status and that catches do not exceed state-wide maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Our goal is to protect recreational access to this important recreational fish as stocks rebuild. It is vital that management targets stock rebuilding where it is needed by taking a regional approach.

TARFish will work with recreational fishers, the State Government and the commercial sector to deliver on this policy which is based on our five priorities:

1. Abundant fish stocks
2. Healthy habitats
3. Fair and protected access to well managed fisheries
4. Safe, easy and inclusive access
5. Robust science and best practice

### **TOP PRIORITIES**

- 1. Return the calamari fishery to a sustainable level**
- 2. Protection of spawning populations from commercial overfishing on Tasmania's North Coast**
- 3. Seasonal spawning closures that protect stock**
- 4. No further cuts to individual bag and possession limits**
- 5. Seagrass protection and restoration**
- 6. No boat limits on recreational fishers**

## Southern Calamari – what’s the catch?

The Southern Calamari (calamari) stock has been assessed as depleting and according to the Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS), *“Sharp regional increases and subsequent fluctuations in catch and effort in recent years suggest that fishing pressure on Southern Calamari is likely to be too high to be sustainable. Despite closures during part of the spawning season, many operators rely on targeting spawning aggregations, which presents a high risk of recruitment impairment.”*

TARFish notes the importance of Tasmania’s spawning populations as indicated in the Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2018-19 (the Assessment (2018-19)) which states *“A more comprehensive genetic study revealed a single stock across southern Australia and that Tasmania is particularly important in terms of reproduction.”*

The Assessment (2018-19) goes on to state that catches between 2015-2019 *“exceed recent estimates of the state-wide maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of 75t 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%.”*

Concerningly, IMAS have indicated there is a similar pattern of overfishing risks to that experienced in the south-east fishery several decades ago and that the south-east spawning aggregations appear to have dispersed.

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### Commercial Catch

The commercial fishing effort has increasingly targeted the northern spawning aggregations driven predominantly by displaced effort from the southern fishery since 2009.

Commercial catch (tonnes) by region is shown in the table below.

Region	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
North West	25.0	37.4	11.4
North East	45.8	44.2	17.1
<b>Total North Coast (TNC)</b>	<b>70.8</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>28.5</b>
East coast	3.4	1.7	2.5
South East	31.9	39.2	27.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>106.2</b>	<b>122.5</b>	<b>58</b>

### Recreational catch

Recreational fishers caught 31 tonnes of calamari in 2017-18, down from 64 tonnes in 2012-13. The recreational catch effort for 2017-18 is shown in the table below.

Approximately equal catches of calamari are taken by boat- and shore-based fishers. There has been a significant reduction in the number of fish being caught by boat with around two-thirds of fish in 2012-13 reducing to around 50% in 2017-18.

Catch effort (% of numbers of calamari caught) is predominant in the southeast and is shown regionally below:

Region	% of fish caught
West Coast:	1%
North:	18%
East Coast	30%
South-East:	51%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Getting it right for abundant calamari

The calamari fishery has significant sustainability issues as outlined earlier. To support returning the fishery to a sustainable level and constraining fishing effort to within the estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for the fishery. TARFish proposes:

WHAT	<b>Management Controls that constrain fishing effort within estimated MSY</b>	<b>Implement a harvest strategy for calamari</b>	<b>Research and monitoring that supports decision making</b>
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seasonal spawning closures that protect stock and allows for regional variation in spawning including extending the Northern seasonal closure (2 weeks added to either side of current closure)</li> <li>Specific commercial management controls that protect the remaining spawning populations on the north coast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a harvest strategy for calamari that identifies triggers and management actions</li> <li>Finer -scale management of fishery through regional-scale harvest strategies sitting within the state-wide strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support research that aims to identify methods to increase stock understanding and stock recovery</li> <li>Estimates of recreational catch are undertaken more frequently</li> </ul>

## Getting it right for calamari habitat

Seagrass meadows are highly diverse and productive habitats that directly and indirectly support many coastal fisheries.

Seagrass is important habitat for calamari, particularly when it comes to spawning and reproduction. Females lay their eggs at the base of seagrass. They are important nursery grounds for juvenile fish, providing them with shelter from predators and strong ocean currents.

WHAT	<b>Actively support habitat restoration programs</b>	<b>Support for recreational fisher education and stewardship to protect existing seagrass beds</b>
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively support and participate in seagrass restoration projects</li> <li>Partner with like-minded organisations to support and lead habitat restoration programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop quality communication materials to improve awareness and understanding of importance of seagrass beds and how fishers can reduce impact on them</li> </ul>



## Getting it right for fair and protected access

Tasmania’s recreational calamari fishers are rightly seeking to ensure that their access is fair and protected for the long term.

It is TARFish’s view that the dominant driver for the increased catches in the north are the commercial sector as supported by the State Government’s 2018 Review of the Southern Calamari fishery (Analysis of Management Tools) which 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 calamari fishery is extremely important to recreational fishers as evidenced by their significant participation in it. TARFish will work hard to protect recreational fishers access to the fishery as stocks rebuild and is of the view that the weight of responsibility for rebuilding stocks should focus on commercial catch constraint.

Further, 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 spawning aggregations.

Recreational fishers typically fish proximate to their place of residence or shack and it is unlikely there is a large movement of effort into other regions to target the species. This is supported by the consistent catch rates in the south of the state.

TARFish strongly opposes further cuts to bag and possession limits and the introduction of a boat limit.

TARFish believes the current bag/possession limits are reasonable given the value that the recreational sector places on this fishery. The feedback we have received from recreational fishers is that no reduction in bag/possession levels for calamari are required/justified. The daily bag limits for Vic are 10, WA 15, NSW 20 & SA 15 therefore any further reductions considered for Tasmania would be out of step with other states that have Southern Calamari.

WHAT	Protecting recreational access to the calamari fishery	Sound and transparent decision making
HOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No further cuts to bag &amp; possession limits</li> <li>• No introduction of boat limits</li> <li>• Development of formal catch share arrangements</li> <li>• Management changes are prioritised for the commercial sector (i.e. come first)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement of reasons provided for fishery management decisions</li> <li>• Management decisions do not fundamentally undermine the long-term security of the fishery for Tasmanians</li> </ul>

## Getting it right for safe, easy and inclusive access

TARFish does not support Boat Limits as they target a specific proportion of recreational fishers – those fishers that fish in groups via boat and supersede the individual's bag/possession rights.

A boat limit would mean targeting a management response for the whole sector at one type of fisher and it is TARFish's view that there is no evidence to support the position that recreational boat fishing for squid is having a greater impact on the sustainability of the population versus other methods.

As fuel costs soar and more fishers look to share the cost of a fishing trip, we think that any measures that may prevent group fishing are unnecessarily punitive.

**WHAT**

**Facilitating safe and convenient access to fishery**

**HOW**

- No introduction of a boat limit

### Sources

*Review of the Southern Calamari fishery (Analysis of Management Tools) (2018)*, Tasmanian Government

Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS), <https://www.fish.gov.au/report/281-Southern-Calamari-2020>

Lyle, J et al. *Survey of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania (November 2019)* Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)

Fraser, K, Hartmann, K, Krueck, N. *Tasmanian Scalefish Fishery Assessment 2019/20 (October 2021)* Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania