What’s the Catch?
The third survey of recreational fishing in Tasmania

Wild Fisheries Management Branch
Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment
What is the survey about?

Over 3000 Tasmanian households were surveyed between November 2012 and October 2013, to see if they fish recreationally. 780 of these households, representing over 2000 persons then provided details of their fishing activities over a 12 month period.

This statistically designed survey by the University of Tasmania’s Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies provides information about recreational fishing in Tasmania including:

- how many people go fishing;
- how many fish are caught;
- where they go fishing and what gear they use;
- how much they spend on fishing; and
- why Tasmanians fish and what they think about key issues.

This is the third statewide survey of recreational fishing in Tasmania since 2000. The surveys give a snapshot of fishing over time by recording key trends in catch and participation, particularly for scalefish.

In addition, specialised surveys are periodically conducted for the rock lobster, abalone, gamefish, offshore and gillnetting fisheries.
Almost one in four Tasmanians (around 98,000 people) went fishing at least once in 2012.

More than twice as many males than females did some form of recreational fishing during the year.

Fishing was most popular amongst younger people with almost one in three participating in the 5-14 years age group. The lowest participation was amongst the 60 years and over age group, with one in eight people fishing. The highest numbers of fishers were in the 45-59 age group with one in four going fishing.
Tasmanians spent the equivalent of more than half a million person days fishing during 2012-13. The average number of days fished was 5.5 days per person.

One in five fishers accounted for more than half of the days fished, highlighting that relatively few fishers have a substantial impact in terms of catch.

Over 90% of Tasmanian fishers fished at least once in saltwater during 2012-13, with 26% fishing at least once in freshwater.

Almost 80% of fishing days were in saltwater, the remainder were in freshwater.

Nearly 60% of all fishing days were in inshore marine waters.

Line fishing occurred on almost 90% of all fishing days, with an average of 3.3 hours fished per day. The next most popular methods were potting (9%), dive harvesting (3%) and gillnetting (3%).

Line fishing accounted for the vast majority of total scalefish catch with flathead, Australian salmon and trout dominating the catch. Around 2% of the total scalefish catch was taken by gillnet, with bastard trumpeter, blue warehou and Atlantic salmon the main species caught.
Recreational Fishing by Region

NORTH: 20%
Key species:
Flathead
Australian salmon
Mullet

EAST: 22%
Key species:
Flathead
Australian salmon
Southern calamari

SOUTH EAST: 34%
Key species:
Flathead
Australian salmon
Atlantic salmon
Goulds squid

INLAND: 21%
Key species:
Flathead
Trout

WEST: 3%
Key species:
Rock lobster
Australian salmon

Main fishing platform:
Boat-based
Shore-based

% = % of total days fished
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Caught</th>
<th>Kept</th>
<th>Released</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flathead</td>
<td>1,611,300</td>
<td>924,900</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Salmon</td>
<td>229,700</td>
<td>144,700</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trout</td>
<td>174,800</td>
<td>105,600</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barracouta</td>
<td>80,300</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gurnard</td>
<td>73,400</td>
<td>17,400</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bream</td>
<td>59,600</td>
<td>19,200</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrasse</td>
<td>54,700</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullet</td>
<td>45,100</td>
<td>26,300</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Mackerel</td>
<td>30,900</td>
<td>28,800</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cod</td>
<td>25,900</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Caught</td>
<td>Kept</td>
<td>Released</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackass Morwong</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>23,700</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flounder</td>
<td>24,800</td>
<td>23,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garfish</td>
<td>17,300</td>
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<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuna</td>
<td>17,100</td>
<td>13,200</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
<td>15,800</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Warehou</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Trevally</td>
<td>10,700</td>
<td>4,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leatherjacket</td>
<td>10,200</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bastard Trumpeter</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>7,600</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striped Trumpeter</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers of key fish species caught, kept and released for 2012-13.*
What’s being caught?

The saltwater catch was dominated by flathead and Australian salmon, the freshwater catch by trout.

Flathead

Flathead was the most popular recreationally caught fish in Tasmania, accounting for 62% of all scalefish taken.

Around 1.6 million flathead were caught, with 43% released. This equates to 925,000 flathead (or 236 tonnes) being kept and 686,000 released.

The recreational catch was around six times the commercial catch taken from Tasmanian waters over a similar period.

Almost 90% of the flathead caught were sand flathead and 5% were tiger flathead, most of the remainder were not identified.

90% of fishing trips involving flathead retained 15 or less flathead per person.

Over half the flathead taken by recreational fishers were caught from the south east coast.

Australian Salmon

Australian salmon was the second most commonly caught fish with 230,000 being taken, 37% of which were released.

The retained catch of 145,000 fish (or 64 tonnes) is equivalent to about a quarter of the Tasmanian commercial catch.

Release rates have increased from 25% in 2000-01 to over 35% in the last two surveys.

Recreational fishing for Australian salmon was popular off northern Tasmania (40% of total catch), in particular the north west coast and Tamar regions.
Southern Calamari

Recreational catches of southern calamari have doubled since 2000-01 with 58,000 (63 tonnes) now being landed. Most calamari were retained with only a 9% release rate.

The increased catch can be attributed to a greater focus on the species and awareness of its eating qualities.

The recreational and commercial catches for calamari during 2012-13 were similar. Notably catches in the north west have increased for both sectors.

Bream

Almost 60,000 bream were caught, with almost 70% released, reflecting the catch and release nature of the fishery.

The River Derwent and East Coast estuaries, rivers and lagoons were key areas for bream fishing.

Trout

Trout were by far the dominant freshwater species taken, with 175,000 landed, and 40% or 69 000 being released. Brown trout represented 89% of the catch, most of the remainder were rainbow trout.

Half of the state’s catch was taken from the Central Plateau area, with the Great Lake and Arthurs Lake key areas. Catches from lakes and dams were over four times greater than from rivers.

Trout were taken mainly by boat-based fishers and mainly by fishers using lures or flies.

Abalone*

An estimated 7,200 licensed fishers fished for abalone in 2012-13. An estimated 66,400 abalone equating to 32 tonnes were kept by recreational fishers. Sixty percent was taken from the Eastern Region. The recreational catch represented about 1.5% of the combined recreational and commercial catch.
An estimated 13,800 licensed fishers fished for rock lobster in 2012-13. Recreational fishers harvested 83,800 rock lobster equating to 82 tonnes in 2012-13. Just over 60% (50 tonnes) was taken from the Eastern Region.

The recreational catch represented 7.6% of the combined commercial and recreational catch in 2012-13.

Recreational potting was the dominant fishing method accounting for 82% of the total days fished and 65% of the catch.

What’s changed since the 2000-01 and 2007-08 surveys?

This is the third major survey of recreational fishing in Tasmania since 2000, the first in 2000-01 and the second in 2007-08.

Since 2000 there has been a general decline in the number of Tasmanians who go recreational fishing, from 125,000 in 2000 to 98,000 in 2012. Declines are evident in age groups younger than 45 years but in particular amongst children and young adults. Tasmania’s ageing population is also a factor, with lowest rates of participation in the 60 plus age group.

The number of days Tasmanians spent fishing has also declined, from about 746,000 fisher days in 2000-01 to 640,000 in 2007-08 and to 507,000 in 2012-13.

Regionally, the number of fishing days off northern Tasmania has declined steadily over time, whereas in most areas off eastern
and southern Tasmania the change has been relatively minor. Fishing in the Derwent and D’Entrecasteaux Channel regions has fluctuated over time but was lower in 2012-13 than in 2000-01.

The overall number of scalefish retained was 2.29 million in 2000-01, 1.62 million in 2007-08 and 1.48 million in 2012-13. Catches of flathead, trout and flounder have declined over time with Australian salmon and Gould’s squid catches highly variable. By contrast, catches of southern calamari and barracouta have increased steadily over the three surveys.

Catches of bream have remained relatively stable although release rates have increased markedly reflecting the popularity and growth of a catch and release fishery for this species.

In 2012-13, release rates for most species were typically higher than in 2000-01 but comparable to those in 2007-08. Reduced catch limits combined with education programs encouraging fishers to take only what they need for a feed are likely factors contributing to the decrease in the retained catch proportions.

Why do Tasmanians fish?

Relaxing in the outdoors with family and friends were the most important reasons for going fishing for over two-thirds of recreational fishers surveyed.

Consuming and catching fish were less important with only around a quarter of fishers saying that this was their primary motivation for fishing.

The vast majority of fishers surveyed indicated that they preferred to retain enough fish for ‘a feed’ rather than catching bag limits.

How much do fishers spend?

In 2012-13 recreational fishers spent an average of $1000 per person on recreational fishing, with total expenditure in Tasmania estimated at $93 million.

This included $22 million on capital items (boats, electronics and trailers), $30 million on boat operating costs (fuel, maintenance, insurance and storage), $11 million
on fishing gear, tackle or dive gear and over $1.5 million on bait, berley and ice. $2.5 million dollars was attributed to accommodation associated with fishing trips.

Over 28,000 boats of all types including kayaks were used for fishing during 2012-13, with a combined market value of about $439m.

A third of all vessels were 4 - 5 metres in length and 19% of vessels were 6 metres and over.

What are the survey results used for?

The survey results improve our understanding of the status of recreational fishing in Tasmania.

Recreational fishers can have a significant effect on the total catch of fish resources. The survey data is used in stock assessments to sustainably manage Tasmania’s fisheries.

Collecting information about recreational fishing is also vitally important in recognising its social and economic benefits to the Tasmanian community.

More Information

This brochure is based on the 2012-13 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Tasmania by the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. To read a full version of the report, go to www.fishing.tas.gov.au/recreational-fisheries-research.

For information about recreational sea fishing visit: www.fishing.tas.gov.au.

For freshwater fishing information visit: www.ifs.tas.gov.au.