

# Marine Heatwaves

## What is a marine heatwave?

A marine heatwave is when an area of the ocean is unusually hot to a significant depth for a number of days, weeks, months or even years.

## What are the impacts of a marine heatwave?

Like heatwaves on land, the unusually hot water temperatures can harm plants, animals, and the environment. Some possible impacts include:

- Heat stressed animals — which can increase their risk infectious diseases.
- Damage to habitats like seagrass beds or kelp forests.
- More biotoxins and harmful algal blooms (usually not visible) which can hurt various fish and shellfish and the people that eat them.

## What might I see?

Marine heatwaves can make fish sick, or fish might change their behaviour in response to the heat.

Heatwaves can also damage the places where fish live. Some signs you might see include:

- Stressed fish and shellfish becoming sick or dying (e.g., abalone, rock lobster, scallops).
- Changes to seagrass beds, kelp forests and other marine habitats.
- Unusually large numbers of fish (and more rarely, birds, seals, dolphins, or whales) dying, sometimes because of biotoxins from increased amounts of harmful algae.
- Some fish usually found in warmer waters start showing up in Tasmanian waters.

## What can I do?

If you are noticing signs of a marine heatwave, there are a few things you can do:

- Make sure to wash and clean your boat, fishing gear, and dive gear when moving between fishing areas to prevent spread of disease.
- Tell NRE Tas if you're seeing signs of a marine heatwave.

Marine heatwaves also make it easier to get sick from seafood, so for the safety of yourself and your family don't harvest or eat fish that are sick or dying, or wild shellfish. If you see a fish kill, don't collect these fish for bait or other uses (like garden fertilisers).

## Who do I talk to?

Call **Biosecurity Tasmania during office hours** on **03 6165 3777** for small numbers of sick, dying, or dead fish, shellfish (including abalone, scallops and rock lobster).

If not considered a disease emergency, please send an email to [AnimalDisease.Enquiries@nre.tas.gov.au](mailto:AnimalDisease.Enquiries@nre.tas.gov.au) and include the following:

- Species and number affected.
- GPS coordinates of location (if possible) and a full description of area (including depth).
- Describe what you are seeing and include any images or video footage you have.
- Contact details – so you can be contacted by Biosecurity Tasmania.

**Do not collect samples for testing unless directed to by Biosecurity Tasmania.**

If you **suspect a disease emergency** (multiple occurrences of sick, dying or dead fish etc) call the 24- hour **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888**.

For sick, dying, or dead marine mammals and seabirds call the **Marine Wildlife (WHALE) Hotline** on **0427 942 537**.

Find out more at [fishing.tas.gov.au/marine-heatwaves](https://fishing.tas.gov.au/marine-heatwaves)

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania