

Wild Fisheries Management Branch, Marine Resources  
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

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## **RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT HARVEST STRATEGY POLICY FOR TASMANIAN WILD FISHERIES (2023)**

TNC encourages rebuilding strategies for Tasmanian fisheries in the context of ecosystem-based fisheries management and marine habitat restoration, and our key recommendations for consideration are as follows:

- particular focus on ecological risk assessments and adaptive management strategies for fishery species known to impact marine biogenic habitats,
- spatial management planning for at-risk biogenic marine habitats that targets areas for both active and passive restoration, and
- operational objectives which integrate the changing health of marine biogenic habitats.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy Australia (TNC), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Harvest Strategy Policy for Tasmanian Wild Fisheries (2023). TNC welcome the development of this framework, and are particularly supportive of the rebuilding strategies for Tasmanian fisheries in the context of ecosystem-based fisheries management and marine habitat restoration. The relationship between healthy coastal habitats and productive marine fisheries is well documented, and TNC has already commenced collaborative partnership initiatives to restore kelp forests and shellfish reefs in Tasmania. Biogenic habit-forming species like giant kelp and native angazi oysters directly and indirectly support stocks of a variety of commercially and recreationally important wild fish species. TNC expects that the marine habitat restoration initiatives in Tasmania will help support biologically sustainable and economically viable fisheries. The various other ecosystem services provided by these habitats (including improving water quality, coastal protection, increasing carbon sequestration and storage, and improved social and cultural benefits) further warrant the inclusion of marine habitat restoration strategies in resource management plans.

In the context of Ecologically Sustainable Development, ecological risk assessments for wild fish harvest strategies could include consideration of adaptive management of predators and/or grazers, the overabundance of which could negatively impact biogenic habitats such as giant kelp forests and shellfish reefs. For example, managing increasing abundances of urchins in Tasmania is necessary for the initial success and overall sustainability of giant kelp forest restoration efforts. While supporting direct harvesting of urchins (e.g., previous commercial sector subsidies) is definitely beneficial for management of urchin populations, an ecosystem-based approach would also integrate stock rebuilding strategies for urchin predators to re-establish important trophic interactions. Rock lobsters are important urchin predators in Tasmanian waters, and TNC is aware of the current initiatives to rebuild lobster stocks along the east coast of Tasmania (e.g., relocation of undersize lobsters from southern regions). With a view toward indirect management strategies, TNC supports the development of targeted educational and awareness campaigns to foster appreciation of the overall ecological value of giant kelp forests and the role both herbivores and their predators play in the sustainability of these habitats.

To account for the spatially variable impacts of fishing on coastal marine ecosystems, TNC recommends developing

harvest strategies which use a spatial management plan which accounts for distributions of marine biogenic habitats in Tasmania, particularly those most at risk of disturbance from fishing activities. For example, a management plan that targets areas for both active and passive restoration of giant kelp forests and their associated marine communities could be developed by incorporating historical knowledge of the distribution of giant kelp, areas known to have experienced giant kelp loss with high potential for restoration, and areas where giant kelp forests are known to persist. Adaptive harvest strategies for these areas would then be based on the potential benefits or negative impacts of fishing activities as viewed from an ecosystem-based approach.

Integrating the changing ecological health and potential for recovery of marine biogenic habitats like kelp forests and shellfish reefs into operational objectives for harvest strategies would increase the relevance of these objectives to the broader ecological risks associated with fishing activities. This approach would also inform the overall ecological risk assessments and risk ratings for Tasmanian wild fisheries, by increasing our understanding of how these activities can directly or indirectly impact marine biogenic habitats.

TNC invite further engagement in this process, and look forward to working with NRE to help support sustainable fisheries and coastal ecosystems in Tasmania.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Tompkins'.

Paul Tompkins  
Kelp Restoration Coordinator  
The Nature Conservancy