Corner Inlet Fishery - ERA Implementation Plan

2025

Identified risk	Action in CI Management Plan to address the risk	Activity undertaken/Mitigation strategy	Anticipated outcome for next assessment
Climate change and weather extremes affect long-term sustainability of fish stocks.	• Continue to monitor stocks and adjust management (**Action 1 iv**). • Maintain flexible and diverse fishing methods and management arrangements to maintain a viable and sustainable fishery (**Action 3 i**).	• Stock assessments are routinely published on the VFA website. These assessments monitor the sustainability of fish stocks and allow the VFA to implement strategies to mitigate any impacts on fish stocks. • Assist with habitat restoration where possible. • Climate change adaptation handbook has been published and provides a guide for fisheries.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
A combination of sediment and nutrients from urban and agricultural run-off, dredging, and small boat activity reduce water quality, cause a decline in seagrass.	• Maintain awareness of changes in seagrass coverage and how this may impact catches in the fishery and respective management arrangements (**Action 7 i**). • Continue to engage with other agencies such as DEECA and local CMA's (**Action 6 iii**).	• The VFA meet bi-annually with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority at the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee to discuss potential water quality issues and impacts. There are currently riparian vegetation restoration programs in place to prevent sediment run off into rivers.	• It is expected that this risk will be lowered at the next ERA review.
Commercial harvest of rock flathead from the Corner Inlet fishery leads to recruitment overfishing.	• VFA will continue to monitor C&E and implement management arrangements appropriately when CPUE begins to drop below an unacceptable level. (**Actions 1 i & 1 iv**).	• A rock flathead research project completed in late 2024 by Deakin university in partnership with the VFA has provided essential information on population dynamics and stock structure (**Action 1 i** & **1 iv**), greatly improving our ability to respond to changes in CPUE which is expected to reduce the severity of this risk at the next review. • Consider the need for pre-recruit survey and find funding source. • Rock Flathead length frequency data is collected annually which provides greater accuracy to stock assessments/stock synthesis models.	• It is expected that this risk will be lowered at the next ERA review.
Cumulative harvest (commercial and recreational) of southern blue-spotted flathead (SBF) and sand flathead from the Corner Inlet fishery leads to recruitment overfishing.	• VFA will continue to monitor C&E and react appropriately when CPUE begins to drop below an unacceptable level (**Actions 1 i & 1 iv**).	• A study in late 2024 in Port Phillip Bay (PPB), Victoria, found that SBF grow rapidly, with females and males maturing at 28cm and 26cm respectively, and generally at less than two years of age. This allows the stock to rebound faster than anticipated and provides management with a greater ability to	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.

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		respond to drops in CPUE (**Action 4 v**). It is expected that this risk will be lower at the next review. • Sand flathead in Corner Inlet are not commonly caught by commercial fishers and are generally caught out of the entrance. Recreational catch has been positive, with an increase in fish caught per-angler hour. • The VFA will continue to monitor cumulative catch and implement management arrangements where needed.	
Cumulative harvest (commercial and recreational) of snapper from the Corner Inlet fishery leads to recruitment overfishing (eastern snapper stock).	• The VFA to improve quantitative monitoring of the stock through its regular stock review reporting and initiate a management review where appropriate (**Action 1 I & Action 1 iv**). • Maintain Recreational creel survey program and closely monitor trends relevant to snapper (**Actions 2 ii-iv**).	• Commercial and recreational effort of eastern snapper in Corner Inlet is low. Given the ongoing low fishing effort seen on the eastern stock. • Since the establishment of the fishery there has only been one incident of high catch, since then it has been negligible, therefor this has been not deemed a risk.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
There is a lack of reliable monitoring data on the recreational fishery currently available.	• Recreational fishing surveys are undertaken in corner inlet (**Action 4 ii**) In the form of creel surveys.	• Boat ramp cameras have been installed and an FRDC funded project provided a method for monitoring recreational fishing pressure using ramp camera data (**Action 4 i**). • The VFA undertakes Creel surveys and Angler diaries in the region which contribute to a more robust recreational fishing dataset	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Discarding of retained species in C.I during mesh netting operations leads to significant unaccounted fishing mortality	• The VFA has begun a study to understand the By-catch associated with mesh netting. Findings from this study will be available 31st January 2026. (**Action 8 iii**)	• The VFA will then use these findings to review and implement (if required) strategies to mitigate unnecessary by-catch and minimise mortality of discards (while minimising any economic impacts) (**Action 8 ii**) by 1 July 2026.	• It is expected that the results of this study will inform better management decisions which will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
A lack of monitoring of commercial bycatch, including dead discards,	• The VFA has begun a study to understand the By-catch associated	• The VFA will then use these findings to review and adjust (if required) management arrangements.	• It is expected that the results of this study will

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results in unforeseen and unacceptable decline of non-retained species in the Inlet.	with mesh netting. Findings from this study will be available 31st January 2026 (**Action 8 ii**).	• Seine netting has been found to be low impact on non-retained species (**Knuckey et al. 2002**).	inform better management decisions which will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Management arrangements do not support efficient, effective and responsive management resulting in suboptimal fishery outcomes.	• The VFA has committed to implement electronic reporting for the Corner Inlet Fishery (**Action 4 iii**).	• The VFA continually monitors and reviews its management arrangements. • The Fisheries (Corner Inlet Fishery) Notice 2025 has recently been reviewed and renewed to ensure fishing pressure is not excessive on fish stocks (**Action 3 i**). • The VFA holds Biannual meetings with the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Board since 2023. • Seafood Industry Victoria has been working with Industry to develop the new Corner Inlet Fishery Code of Practice. Expected to be published in 2025.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Available research/ collected scientific information is not sufficient to support efficient, effective and responsive management resulting in suboptimal fishery outcomes.	• Development of research priority list which was included in the management plan. Funding for these projects is being sought (**Action 4 v**). Many of these projects have been completed or are underway.	• Recent studies have provided valuable information on rock flathead and southern blue spot flathead. Rock flathead stock structure research was published in late 2024. • The transition to eCatch will improve the speed of reporting which will assist management practices. • The installation of boat ramp cameras and the findings of the associated FRDC project has improved our understanding of rec fishing effort (**Action 4 v**). • Research into ramp cameras effectiveness in monitoring fishing effort is expected to provide greater scientific information which will support efficient, effective and responsive management. • By-catch monitoring is underway and due to be completed 31 January 2026.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.

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Some Corner Inlet access licence holders do not support the management arrangements for the fishery leading to a change in practices to work around existing regulations.	• The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee informs on the need for managerial changes (**Action 16 iii**). • The VFA ensures adequate consultation on management changes (**Action 16 ii**).	• The VFA monitors VMS behaviour and regularly patrols Corner Inlet-Norramunga to ensure compliance of fisheries legislation. • VFA compliance and the Fishery Manager met with Corner Inlet Licence Holders to discuss the recently published Corner Inlet supplementary fishing guide which was published in 2024. It is expected that non-compliance will be reduced as fishery education has increased.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Land and water management arrangements do not mitigate risk of detrimental impacts to water quality in fishing areas and losses of seagrass.	• Continue to engage with WGCMA and Corner Inlet Connections Partner Group to support improvements to water quality and help recognise the importance of the fishery (**Actions 6 iii** & **7 iii**)	• In late 2024 the VFA engaged with local CMAs to discuss the water in-flows from nearby rivers and discussed ways to reduce sedimentation and poor water quality. • The VFA and West Gippsland CMA meet at the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC) bi-annually. • Constant communication between relevant stakeholders is expected to lower the risk rating at the next review. (**Action 6 iii**)	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Known pests including European green shore crab, Pacific oyster, New Zealand screw shell and broccoli weed cause an unacceptable impact on the fishery's ecosystem by competing for food and/or space. Wakame (Undaria pinnatifida) at Port Welshpool spreads to surrounding areas via the hulls of vessels.	• Continue to engage with Agriculture Victoria and Parks Victoria in relation to marine pest incursions (**Action 7 iii**).	• The VFA has implemented fishing permits in Gippsland Lakes to combat European Green Shore crab populations which has significantly reduced their population and spread. • The VFA will, on a case-by-case basis, issue permits and or funding to help combat these species when they appear in the area. • Recent discussions with Parks Vic, DEECA and some licence holders, have indicated European Green Shore Crabs are not seen often in the inlet (**Action 7 iii**). • The VFA will continue to discuss invasive pests with the MAC to understand the degree (if any) to which these species have spread.	• Given the proactive nature of the CIFMAC, communication with external stakeholders and the ability to issue permits for the take of these species, it is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.

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Northern Pacific seastar (Asterias amurensis) establishes in Corner Inlet and causes an unacceptable impact by preying on native species, including oysters, mussels and scallops.	• Continue to engage with Agriculture Victoria and Parks Victoria in relation to marine pest incursions (**Action 7 iii**).	• Research in Port Phillip Bay has shown ways to reduce the spread and impact of Asterias. Findings from these studies will be implemented to help reduce the spread. • Ongoing discussions at the CIFMAC take place to discuss potential outbreaks of the Northern Pacific Sea Star. Further, ships are required to flush their ballast out at sea to prevent pest species spreading into ports. It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review. • The VFA will continue to discuss invasive pests with the MAC and Parks Vic to understand the degree (if any) to which these species have spread (**Action 7 iii**).	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
European fan worms form dense colonies in Corner Inlet and consume vast amounts of food to the detriment of native species.	• Continue to engage with Agriculture Victoria and Parks Victoria in relation to marine pest incursions (**Action 7 iii**).	• The CIFMAC discusses pest species regularly to identify when action must be taken to address an outbreak of pest species (**Action 7 iii**). • There has been no indication that European fan worms have established themselves to detrimental levels. • Ships are required to flush their ballast out at sea before entering port, to prevent pest species spreading into local ports.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.
Sea urchin populations increase significantly causing an unacceptable reduction in seagrass coverage.	• The VFA will continue to monitor and provide management arrangements to support the commercial and recreational take of urchins in Corner Inlet should their populations pose a risk to seagrass (**Action 7 iii**). • Continue to engage with and support Parks Victoria in relation to sea urchin management in Corner Inlet (**Actions 6 iii & Action 7 iii**).	• Sea urchin populations have been reduced to normal levels since their targeted eradication in 2023/24. • As urchin barrens have subsided. Urchins are a natural species and have returned to pre-barren levels.	• It is expected this mitigation strategy will result in a lowered risk rating at the next ERA review.

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