

Sara Ronald
Victorian Fisheries Authority
By email: sara.ronald@vfa.vic.gov.au

Dear Sarah,

SUBMISSION FOR DRAFT FISHERIES (CORNER INLET) NOTICE 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Fisheries Notice for Corner Inlet.

Corner Inlet is a very important recreational fishery and VRFish has been receiving ongoing feedback from a broad cross-section of recreational fishers about the performance and their concerns in the fishery.

VRFish wrote to the Minister of Fishing and Boating on August 26, 2019 to convey recreational fisher concerns that there has been a substantial increase and change in commercial fishing effort by new operators and to seek urgent management intervention. These concerns have equally been echoed by representatives from the Corner Inlet Fishery access license holders.

In consulting with recreational fishers, the broad consensus is the voluntary code of conduct has been effective to reduce conflict with our sector, while providing a level playing field for the commercial license holders. However, with new operators buying into fishery in recent years, the change in both attitude and fishing behaviour has disrupted the balance that once existed. Recreational fishers have reported to VRFish observations that commercial fishing effort has increased in recent years by a small number of new operators. This change in effort is not sustainable and has negatively impacted our fishing experience.

Overall, the VRFish supports the fishery notice as it will contribute to restoring the accepted 'balance' back in the fishery. Legislating the commercial voluntary code of conduct demonstrates to recreational fishers that the commercial sector as a whole is committed to continuing to work in partnership to manage for a sustainable fishery and abundant fish stocks for all in Corner Inlet. The requirement of VMS will also add to the community confidence that commercial fishing is being conducted in accordance with the legal requirements while improving the effectiveness of fisheries compliance.

Greater management controls and oversight need to be in place as the fishery transitions and evolves over time. As long-standing licensees in the commercial fishery decide to sell their licenses to new entrants, there is a high risk these new entrants (as

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has already been observed) will want to fish the license to the fullest extent possible and change the dynamics of the fishery.

One aspect of the voluntary code that is not considered in the draft Fishery Notice is the agreement commercial licensees can only fish one side of Fishing Reporting Areas 1, 2 and 3 or Areas 4 and 5 on one day. We would like to know why this is not proposed in the draft Fisheries Notice. We strongly believe this requirement could help to reduce spatial conflict that has been reported by our recreational fishers.

In speaking to recreational fishers, they have consistently observed both an increase in commercial effort and decline in their catches from Port Albert to Mann's Beach (area 4 and 5). We recommend only fishing one side of Lewis Channel in one day should also be included in the fisheries notice to help alleviate an increase in commercial fishing effort outside of historically 'normal' levels. We note that the Corner Inlet Stock Assessment in 2016 reported an increase in mesh netting effort in fishing area 4 and 5 and no data has been provided to determine if this trend is continuing.

Our position is greater management and legislation is required for the Corner Inlet fishery to ensure both recreational and commercial fisher's objectives are sufficiently met now and into the future. As Corner Inlet is Victoria's last commercial inshore net fishery, a Fishery Management Plan and an updated stock assessment is essential. The fishery notice with our recommended inclusions is a positive and essential step to restore an acceptable balance to the Corner Inlet Fishery. The Fisheries Notice will be welcomed by recreational fishers.

VRFish looks forward to continuing to foster a productive relationship and ongoing conversation with the commercial sector and the Victorian Fisheries Authority on the effective management of the Corner Inlet fishery and common aspirations for habitat restoration and water quality improvement.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Loats', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rob Loats
Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

15 June 2020