

## OFFICIAL

Dear Sir/Madam

Congratulations on the release of the draft Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishery Plan and thank you for the opportunity to comment on it.

Please find below our submission on the draft Plan:

- WGCMA supports the integrated approach outlined in the draft plan. The strategies in the draft Plan cover all relevant issues at a high level.
- *Strategy 1: Involvement of recreational fishers, traditional owners and community partners from day one:*
  - The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority welcomes the opportunity to work with the Victorian Fisheries Authority and partners on the Steering Committee to oversee implementation of the Plan.
  - Discussions between WGCMA and VRFish have concluded that increased engagement with anglers on fish habitat and waterway health, including environmental flows, would be beneficial. Suggest including this in the Plan.
- *Strategy 2: Revised regulations for recreational fishing, including changes to catch and size limits for iconic species such as black bream:*
  - Reducing the bag limit for black bream and creating a size “slot limit” to allow larger bream to breed in the Gippsland Lakes makes sense given the status of the Gippsland Lakes black bream fishery as ‘depleting’.
- *Strategy 3: Fish stocking throughout the lakes system to increase the biomass of dusky flathead and black bream:*
  - While fish stocking is an important tool in helping to recover wild fish populations, our understanding is that some overseas fisheries have found an over-reliance on fish stocking can lead to a gradual decline in wild fish populations. It will therefore be important to get the balance right between fish stocking and other options. i.e. regulation (strategy 2) and fish habitat (strategy 4). An assessment of the benefits and costs and critical knowledge gaps associated with each option proposed to improve the recreational fishery would assist in achieving this balance. Targeted research to assess the risk of stocked fish “swamping” remnant wild populations may be warranted.
- *Strategy 4: Improving fish habitat and waterway health:*
  - The inclusion of fish habitat and waterway health in the draft Plan is sound given the high priority placed on it by fishers who responded to the online survey and its long-term role in sustaining fish populations.
  - This section could be clearer on its ‘value add’ to what is already planned/underway. Suggest the focus of this strategy be to support implementation of the West and East Gippsland Waterway Strategies and the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site Management Plan. These documents set out comprehensive targets and actions for improving waterway health (including fish habitat) in the Gippsland Lakes and their inflowing rivers and fringing wetlands. They were developed in conjunction with partners and local communities, including recreational fishers, and underpin the Gippsland Lakes Priorities Plan. East and West Gippsland CMAs are very well placed, with keen landholders, partners and methods, to deliver more on-ground works to improve fish habitat. The main factor limiting implementation is funding. We look forward to working with VFA and partners to identify feasible solutions to accelerate the implementation of actions related to fish habitat in these strategies and plans.

- Improvement of fish passage warrants mention in this section as a strategy to improve fish populations through improvement in habitat and waterway health (it is an action in the abovementioned strategies and plans e.g. removal of Nicholson Dam and construction of a fishway over Maffra Weir).
- Something to consider for implementation of the Plan: The potential strategic importance of improvement in the condition of Lake Wellington as a black bream feeding/breeding area to complement the eastern lakes. This could be particularly relevant under climate change, which may see the salinity concentrations needed for spawning of black bream occurring more frequently in the western end of the Gippsland Lakes.
- *Strategy 5: Monitoring the success of the plan's actions:*
  - The studies proposed to monitor the impact of the Plan are comprehensive in terms of the highest order outcome: Fish populations and satisfaction of fishers.
  - Suggest including the need to monitor the success of the Plan's actions designed to achieve this outcome, including fish habitat and waterway health.
- *Strategy 6: Evaluation of the plan's processes:*
  - The planned evaluation process for the implementation of the plan seems appropriate.

Thanks again for the opportunity, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions in relation to our submission.