

Frequently asked questions

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What is the Corner Inlet fishery?

The Corner Inlet fishery is located in marine waters of southern Gippsland, approximately 200 kilometres southeast of Melbourne (area shown in Figure 1). It is a multi-species, multi-gear fishery enjoyed by recreational, commercial and indigenous fishers. The fishery is diverse, with more than 20 different species retained on a regular basis.

The Corner Inlet fishery is a significant supplier of high quality, local seafood including species such as King George whiting, southern sea garfish, rock flathead, calamari, flounder and gummy shark. The commercial fishery alone has an average landed catch worth \$3 million per annum in Gross Value of Production. Further, the fishery provides important economic and social value to the southern Gippsland region, supporting local employment in regional towns and providing one of Victoria's best recreational fishing destinations.

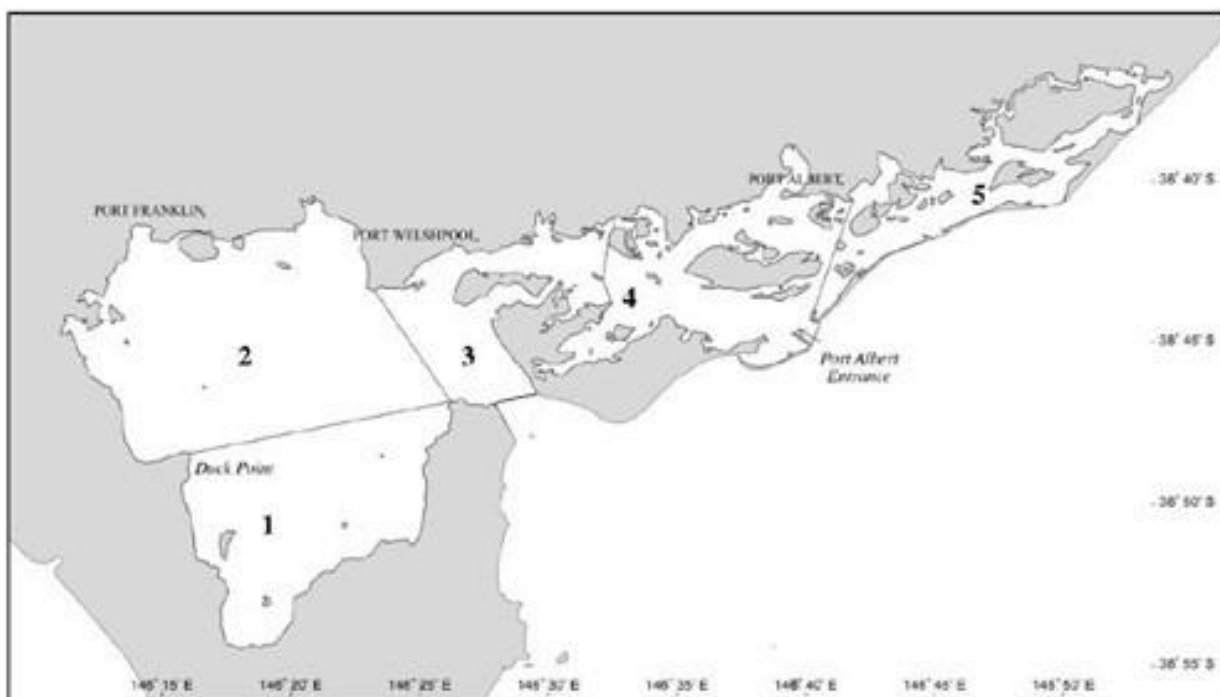


Figure 1. Map of Corner Inlet fishery. The fishery includes areas numbered 1 to 5, however fishing is prohibited within the Corner Inlet Marine National Park (not shown in this image, refer to vfa.vic.gov.au/marineparks for details).

What is the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan?

The management plan specifies the policies and objectives, strategies and actions for managing the Corner Inlet fishery in accordance with the requirements of the *Fisheries Act 1995*. It is designed to ensure that the commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing sectors, along with other interested stakeholders, have a clear framework specifying how the fishery resource will be managed over coming years to ensure it remains a thriving fishery into the future.

Who prepared the management plan?

The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan has been prepared by Victorian Government in close-consultation with a stakeholder-based Steering Committee comprised of representatives from VRFish, FutureFish, Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV), Corner Inlet Fishery Access licence holders, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and the Victorian Fisheries Authority. Various other stakeholders were involved along the way, including leading expert scientists, landcare representatives, state government agencies, and any interested observers. Steering Committee meeting summaries have been made publicly throughout development of the Plan and can be accessed at: www.vfa.vic.gov.au/cornerinletplan

Were public submissions considered?

Yes. 38 submissions were received during the 60-day public consultation period (29 December 2021 to 27 February 2022) on the draft version of the plan. All submissions were considered by the VFA in consultation with the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee before any proposed amendments were made. A report was then provided to the Minister for Fishing and Boating along with a final recommended Plan for consideration and declaration by the Minister.

The submissions and further details can be found at: <https://vfa.vic.gov.au/operational-policy/fisheries-consultation/completed-consultation>

What are the objectives for the fishery?

The management plan sets out the following objectives:

- Objective 1: Ensure sustainability of the Corner Inlet fishery resource
- Objective 2: Maintain the ecological integrity of the fishery ecosystem
- Objective 3: Ensure fishing practices are ethical, responsible and respectful and promote harmony amongst stakeholders
- Objective 4: Protect Traditional Owner cultural heritage and values
- Objective 5: Ensure optimal economic utilisation of the Corner Inlet resource
- Objective 6: Cost-effective and participatory management

What actions are planned?

There are a total of 57 actions included in the management plan. Some of the key initiatives include:

- establish an ongoing, stakeholder-based Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC)
- enhance local seafood and fishing festivals (e.g. commence Vic fish kids events)
- undertake a catch survey for recreational and indigenous fishing in Corner Inlet
- development of a new voluntary Code of Practice for commercial Corner Inlet fishers to ensure responsible fishing into the future
- improve access to fresh local seafood for Victorian consumers, including through offshore Hook and Line Permits to existing licence holders
- develop and implement a bycatch monitoring program
- reduce the recreational bag limit for shellfish (e.g. cockles) to 2 litres per person per day
- transition the commercial fishery to electronic reporting
- engage Traditional Owners (including GLaWAC) and relevant indigenous groups to assist with local habitat or species monitoring / improvement works where Cultural Rangers have capacity to assist.

For the full list and further details, check out section 4.2 of the management plan.

What are the planned changes to recreational fishing in Corner Inlet?

The management plan maintains all existing recreational fishing arrangements and access, with the exception of one planned change relating to the recreational bag limit for cockles in the Corner Inlet fishery. A reduction from 5 litres to 2 litres per person per day of cockles is included as an action in the Plan. There are no other changes indicated within the management plan for any recreational species, bag or size limits specific to the Corner Inlet fishery.

The planned change to the cockle bag limit is designed to better share the resource, particularly in increasingly popular harvesting areas such as McLoughlins Beach and will ensure quality fishing opportunities remain into the future. The change is not expected to be implemented until late 2022.

What are the planned changes to commercial fishing in Corner Inlet?

The management plan includes an action to transition the commercial fishery to electronic reporting from 2022/23. This will mean commercial fishers would no longer send in paper-based catch and effort records each month, and will instead be required to submit this information to the VFA after each trip electronically with an easy-to-use mobile phone app. The VFA will work closely with commercial fishers to ensure a smooth transition.

While there have been significant changes for the commercial fishery in the last two years (further details below), there are no additional changes proposed to the commercial fishing laws at this time. A summary of the

current commercial management arrangements is provided in section 5.2 of the management plan.

What management changes were recently introduced for the commercial fishery?

The commercial fishery has a long and proud history of sustainable management, driven by the fishers themselves. A number of commercial fishers raised concerns regarding an increase in catches around 2019-20, noting that some fishers were operating outside of the commercial fishers' voluntary Code of Practice. Concerns were also raised by VRFish and recreational fishers. In response, several new management arrangements that limit commercial fishing effort have been implemented for the fishery in the last 18 months.

The VFA issued the first Fisheries Notice in June 2020 and this was followed by a separate Fisheries Notice in March 2021. These brought in new restrictions on how authorised fishing gear can be used and how often. The management arrangements are designed to ensure the fishery remains sustainable and safe and were developed in consultation with Corner Inlet's commercial licence holders and various key stakeholders. A summary on each of the management arrangements is provided in section 5.2 of the management plan or you can view the full Fisheries Notices on the VFA website.

The Fisheries Notice rules are now contained in the Fisheries (Further Corner Inlet Fishery) Notice 2022 and are still relatively new (with some of these rules only introduced in March 2021). The continued effectiveness of the Fisheries Notice will be closely monitored by the VFA over the next 12-24 months in consultation with the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (once established).

In late 2020, the requirement to have a VMS unit installed on all vessels listed for use on a Corner Inlet Fishery Access Licence was also introduced. The VMS unit must be turned on when the vessel leaves port on a commercial fishing trip and provides information to the VFA on the vessel's exact location.

How is the commercial fishery primarily managed?

The commercial fishery is primarily managed using input controls, which limits the amount of fishing effort that can occur and indirectly controls catch. It recognises that commercial netting takes a wide variety of species and the catch composition can fluctuate widely between years due to a number of factors such as natural variations in recruitment, environmental conditions and other influences. An input-controlled management regime has been effective in maintaining a productive and sustainable Corner Inlet fishery for many decades.

What is the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC)?

A key action of the management plan is to establish an ongoing, stakeholder-based Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC) from late 2022. The Committee will include participation of all fishing sectors to continue the partnership and co-management approach with the VFA. This will ensure all stakeholders are closely involved in future management decisions and will be supported by ongoing, effective scientific monitoring information. Part of CIFMAC's role will be to review the latest fishery information and help to ensure management remains adaptive and responsive. It will oversee implementation of the management plan and support more effective consultation with key partners and all stakeholders. The VFA intends to seek interest from fishers who live at or near the fishery that may wish to get involved as a member of the Committee.

How will this Plan support an effective, efficient and sustainably managed resource?

The plan sets out objectives, strategies and actions to ensure that management of the fishery is precautionary and focused on advancing the fishery by ensuring adequate scientific information is collected, new technologies are implemented, and that economic, social and cultural aspects are enhanced. It also ensures management remains adaptive and responsive.

Where do I obtain a copy of the management plan?

A copy of the management plan can be accessed and downloaded at: www.vfa.vic.gov.au/cornerinletplan

Alternatively, you can email Lachlan.Smith@vfa.vic.gov.au requesting a copy.

When was the final plan declared?

The Minister for Fishing and Boating declared the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan on 30 June 2022.