

Introduction

Following the 2019 TACC forums held during the week of 1-5 April 2019, Seafood Industry Victoria and the Victorian Rock Lobster Association have undertaken our annual poll (sent to all Victorian Rock Lobster licence holders where an email address is on record¹) to provide advice on behalf of industry to the Victorian Fisheries Authority regarding TACC preferences and a position on various other management arrangements. Opportunity was also provided for respondents to make additional comments, all of which have been de-identified and included in the data below.

Noting the short window of opportunity to provide response prior to the Easter period, following the forums, SIV and VRLA undertook the survey via SurveyMonkey capitalising on the limited time.

Of the 66 emails sent out to all Victorian Rock Lobster licence holders, 44 responses were successfully completed online. There were 6 licence holders who received then email that clicked the link to the survey but did not manage to complete the survey.

The responses that were received from industry are summarised and presented below.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Eastern Zone licence holder	27.27%	12
Western Zone licence holder	70.45%	31
I fish both the Eastern and Western Zone	2.27%	1
TOTAL		44

The 44 respondents collectively hold 52 licences, and we received 12 Eastern Zone respondents and the 31 Western Zone respondents, with 1 participant fishing in both the Eastern and Western Zones, as outlined by the above table.

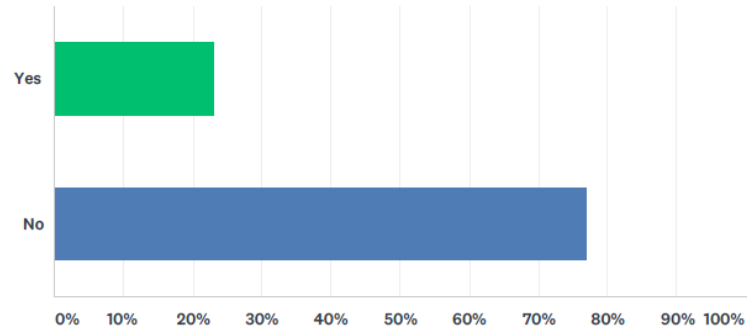
¹ By way of a reminder (and potentially for additional reach) a text message was also sent to the mobile phone of all VRLA Members that included a link to the survey.

Results - Eastern Zone TACC

Note: where the figures state 'skipped' this is due to respondents being directed away from the entire page as they identified as Western Zone fishers only.

Q4 Proposal of 31 tonne TACC from the VFA, do you support this?

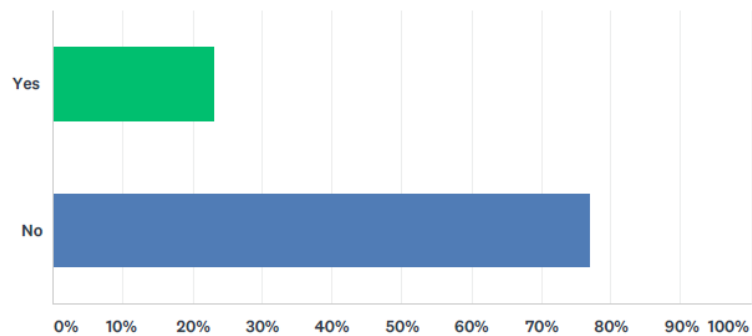
Answered: 13 Skipped: 31



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	23.08%	3
No	76.92%	10
Total Respondents: 13		

Q5 Proposal of 38 tonnes TACC from industry - do you support this?

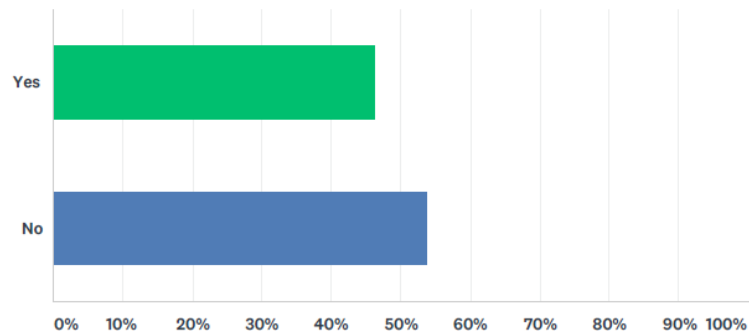
Answered: 13 Skipped: 31



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	23.08%	3
No	76.92%	10
Total Respondents: 13		

Q6 Proposal of 40 tonnes TACC from industry - do you support this?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 31



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	46.15%	6
No	53.85%	7
Total Respondents: 13		

Other proposals for TACC received:

One fisher recommended "26 tonne".

Comments/rationale received regarding the setting of the TACC for 2019/20:

"Cutting a third of the catch is too much."

"Yes, restricting the rec sector to a 10 percent cap would be a good start. Opening up the bay to lobster harvesting as was for 50 years".

"By setting the TACC at 40 tonnes for the 2019/2020 quota season, we are effectively reducing the TACC by 32.20% or 19 tonnes compared to where the TACC was for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 season. The CPUE data for the current season suggests that the fishery is not in as bad a state as previously first thought and with some 12 tonnes being left on the ground compared to the previous season, a reduction any lower than 40 tonnes I believe is unnecessary. I would strongly support a setting of the TACC at 40 tonnes provided that it were to stay at this point for a minimum of at least two(2) full seasons but preferably three(3) full seasons regardless, even if the CPUE Band suggests that it is safe to have an increase in the TACC. In addition to this recommendation, may I also suggest that if at the end of the third season the CPUE Band is suggesting i.e. an increase of five(5) tonnes we only increase it by half in which case the fourth(4th) season would see the TACC set at 42.5 tonnes. I honestly believe that this approach would provide stability and financial reassurance within the fishery and the conservative approach to increases would also have far greater long-term benefits for the EZ RL Fishery by better supporting the family owned and operated businesses. All this aside, if the CPUE data was suggesting a TACC reduction within the three(3) year period as mentioned above, then I would also support this decision."

“More funded research in localise areas using running closures for both rec and com harvesting due to over exploitation of stock. More controls on charter dive vessels milking the stupid rec two crays a day rule taking hundreds of kilos from prime grounds”.

“Tinkering with the exploitation rate to 20% was not agreed to as the default option at the recent RAG, the RAG simply acknowledged that a reduction to 26 tonnes would have a severe short-term impact on the economic viability of the fishery. The RAG did note that under the management plan the TAC should be 26 tonnes (or 23 tonnes under the revised 2000-2015 data set). The RAG recognised there needed to be a significant cut but was reluctant to put a figure on that cut outside the parameters of the current management plan. Personally, I would support keeping the exploitation rate at 15%, thus decreasing the uncertainty. Given the lack of PRI data and the small geographic range its collected over we should have stuck to the 15% exploitation rate stipulated in the management plan and then looked at incremental TAC increases in the future that considered both what PRI data was being collected while recognising that this dataset was incomplete. By increasing the exploitation rate we only increase the uncertainty about the way the fishery is being managed, from both a PRI and TAC perspective. It's shortsighted, irresponsible and not precautionary.”

“The fishery is not as bad as made out to be”.

“If 10 percent of lobsters were caught in the bays would take huge amount of pressure off”.

“The zone is capable of maintaining 38, the pri index should be removed until we can get a better data set”.

“32 tonne is too drastic for this year.”

“There is no compensation for reductions in TACC, therefore a further reduction needs to be carefully considered”.

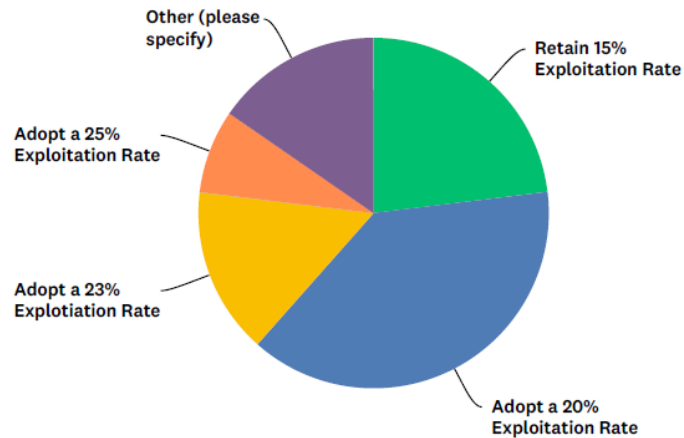
“More options to licence holders to use their licence without quota for catching bycatch such as snapper, leather jackets and returning any lobsters back unharmed maybe incorporating a small state hook permit attached to the licence? Seeing they have ruined good sustainable fisheries in PPB and now Gippsland Lakes. By reducing the quota again makes it hard to find any spare quota in the industry without paying Crazy lease fees for it. I couldn't get any last year, was very disappointing VFA are making it hard for a regular guy to enter and survive in this industry without having a cashed up trust fund from a rich family to be able to fish”.

“31t gives a better chance at healthy future rebuild of biomass”.

There were a range of other questions, options and issues raised by the VFA and industry in recent times, therefore we sought industry views on these. The below table presents the summary results for the Eastern Zone:

	DO NOT SUPPORT	UNDECIDED	MIGHT SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT (COMMENT PROVIDED BELOW)	SLIGHTLY SUPPORT	STRONGLY SUPPORT	TOTAL
Update the TACC Lookup tables to reflect the most recent and representative 1978-2016 CPUE-Biomass relationship (as is shown in the CPUE Look up table image above - titled 'Table 4').	0% 0	58% 7	0% 0	17% 2	25% 3	12
Implementation of extended closed seasons - if 'supported' please identify your preferred closure period.	50% 6	8% 1	0% 0	8% 1	33% 4	12
Extending the open fishing season to allow operator flexibility.	42% 5	0% 0	8% 1	0% 0	50% 6	12
Re-opening of Port Phillip Bay and WesternPort Bay to commercial rock lobster fishing.	8% 1	8% 1	0% 0	8% 1	75% 9	12
The number of undersized rock lobsters I am seeing is positive.	25% 3	25% 3	17% 2	17% 2	17% 2	12
There is a need for considering percentage ownership control options, including options for an individual catch limit.	25% 3	33% 4	0% 0	8% 1	33% 4	12
Rock Lobster licence fees need to be reviewed should there be a further TACC reduction.	23% 3	8% 1	0% 0	0% 0	69% 9	13
Adopt for the Victorian Rock Lobster Fishery, appropriate reference points that relate to Virgin Egg Production (rather than 1951 levels) to align with the National Standard.	0% 0	17% 2	8% 1	25% 3	50% 6	12
Further consideration of finer spatial management, including pot/quota allocations is required.	42% 5	17% 2	8% 1	8% 1	25% 3	12

When considering the RLRAG Recommendation to adopt the most recent and representative 1978-2016 Biomass Relationship. Participants were then asked which Exploitation Rate they support being implemented in the Eastern Zone. The following results were achieved:



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Retain 15% Exploitation Rate	23.08%	3
Adopt a 20% Exploitation Rate	38.46%	5
Adopt a 23% Exploitation Rate	15.38%	2
Adopt a 24% Exploitation Rate	0.00%	0
Adopt a 25% Exploitation Rate	7.69%	1
Other (please specify)	15.38%	2
TOTAL		13

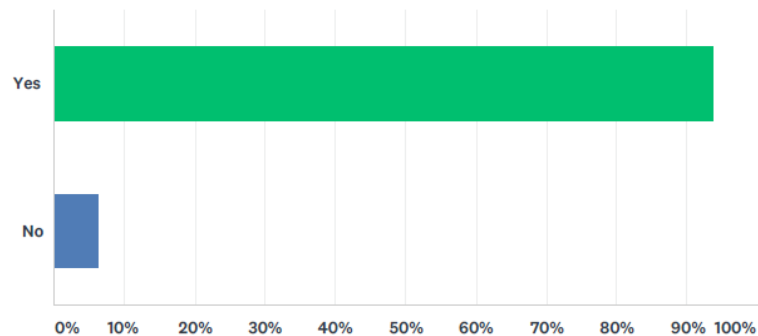
Note: two participants voted 'Other', with one abstaining from the vote and another recommending changing the Exploitation Rate from 15 to 17.5%.

Results - Western Zone TACC

Note: where the figures state 'skipped' this is due to respondents being redirected away from the entire page as they are Eastern Zone fishers.

Q14 Proposal of 245 tonne TACC from the VFA, do you support this?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 12



Other proposals for TACC received:

"Yes I think fishery could handle another increase if not this year then next".

"I think that real time catch rate should be used as a guide as well for setting TACC and that your standardised chart should be explained in more detail on what goes into it and how you come up with your results , one would think if you are taking on board the facts of weather, winter fishing, death by Occy etc. into this charter you would think that the standardised results would be higher than what is actually happening but they seem to be lower for some reason. Real time catch rate is at .81 a pot lift so this indicates that we are going in the right direction so maybe a TACC increase is possible the following season".

Industry commentary received on the position of the TACC:

"Steady as it goes".

"see how the next year's harvest is still on the increase do not have any more to add".

"Happy with how it is".

"Create 50t WZ quota to be caught offshore only, say over 110 m. There is a virtually unfished resource in the deep water now because market focus is on red Crays only, observations indicate an abundance of Crays that aren't fished at all. These crays marketable and the fishing of them may reduce pressure on inshore stocks".

"Obviously Sustainable from performance of the fishery".

"If it is not broken, don't fix it."

“There is plenty of lobster out there. The lobster stock is rebuilding. You now catch all size classes, which proves that there more and more lobster left in the water every year and that the ground is not been over exploited.”

“Although our catch rates are improving, we are still seeing extremely low levels of undersize lobsters. The PRI index trigger point has not been met. There can be no increase in TACC. if we follow our management plan. I support a 245 tonne TACC.”

“Leave it alone for another 12 months, I believe egg surveys and undersize data is floored and is much better data is just a guide”.

“I believe that there is no reason to lift the TACC as we still have a low amount of unders in the Warrnambool area”.

“The current TACC appears to be at a healthy state and gives room for healthy growth in the near future”.

There were a range of other questions, options and issues raised by the VFA and industry in recent times, therefore we sought industry views on these. The below table presents the summary results for the Western Zone:

	DO NOT SUPPORT	UNDECIDED	MIGHT SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT (COMMENT PROVIDED BELOW)	SLIGHTLY SUPPORT	STRONGLY SUPPORT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Update the TACC Lookup tables to reflect the most recent and representative 2000-2016 CPUE-Biomass relationship (as is shown in image above - titled 'Table 2').	9.38% 3	50.00% 16	3.13% 1	6.25% 2	31.25% 10	32	3.00
Implementation of extended closed seasons - if 'supported' please identify your preferred closure period.	53.13% 17	31.25% 10	0.00% 0	6.25% 2	9.38% 3	32	1.88
Extending the open fishing season to allow operator flexibility.	25.00% 8	28.13% 9	0.00% 0	9.38% 3	37.50% 12	32	3.06
The number of undersized rock lobsters I am seeing is positive.	6.25% 2	25.00% 8	3.13% 1	31.25% 10	34.38% 11	32	3.63
Seek a reduction in the male LML to that of the female LML.	46.88% 15	15.63% 5	0.00% 0	9.38% 3	28.13% 9	32	2.56
There is a need for considering percentage ownership control options, including options for an individual catch limit.	15.63% 5	21.88% 7	0.00% 0	9.38% 3	53.13% 17	32	3.63
Adopt for the Victorian Rock Lobster Fishery, appropriate reference points that relate to Virgin Egg Production (rather than 1951 levels) to align with the National Standard.	18.75% 6	40.63% 13	3.13% 1	15.63% 5	21.88% 7	32	2.81
Further consideration of finer spatial management, including pot/quota allocations is required.	21.88% 7	46.88% 15	3.13% 1	18.75% 6	9.38% 3	32	2.47

When considering the RLRAG Recommendation to adopt the most recent and representative 2000-2016 Biomass Relationship. Participants were then asked which Exploitation Rate they support being implemented in the Western Zone. The following results were achieved:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
32.5% Exploitation Rate	37.50% 12
30% Exploitation Rate	12.50% 4
28% Exploitation Rate	3.13% 1
26.2% Exploitation Rate	21.88% 7
26% Exploitation Rate	3.13% 1
Other (please specify)	21.88% 7
TOTAL	32

Note: the following 'Other' proposals and comments on amending the Exploitation Rate were received.

"Adopt 26.2% from 0.6 and above. Leave 32.5% below 0.6." Supported by two licence holders.

"I believe that the exploitation rate of 32.5% should be retained. I believe that the model is flawed because it doesn't consider in that the fleet has decline by more than 50% since 2000 and that much of the deep-water lobster ground is not been worked. Some is this ground produced high catches in the past. There should be some research done into how much of the lobster ground in the western zone is been exploited compared to the 2000s. I wish to state that I strongly object to the VFA providing there preferred options in regard to the exploitation rate (26% and 26.2%) this could mislead uninformed fishermen. I thought that the VFA might of been different, but it seems like the dept in the past that they are pretending to consult but at same time telling us what they want and what we will get."