



Consultation on the Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishery Plan and black bream fishing regulations: Summary of Stakeholder Survey Results

The Draft Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishery Plan (the Plan) was released for public consultation by the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) over a six-week period from 16 September to 28 October 2020.

With the foundational step of early removal of commercial net fishing in April 2020 and recent signs of positive black bream recruitment, the Plan establishes a framework for further rebuilding fish stocks and recreational fishing opportunities in the Gippsland Lakes.

The public and recreational fishers were invited to provide their views on the Plan via an online survey and formal written submissions. A total of 4,338 responses to the survey were received along with seven written submissions. This is a significant level of response and demonstrates the importance of the fishery and its recovery to Victoria's recreational fishing community. The results of the survey are summarised below.

Overall, the survey results highlight a high level of support for revised fisheries regulations for black bream and other complementary actions to restore the recreational fishery, such as habitat and stock enhancement.

1. Survey overview

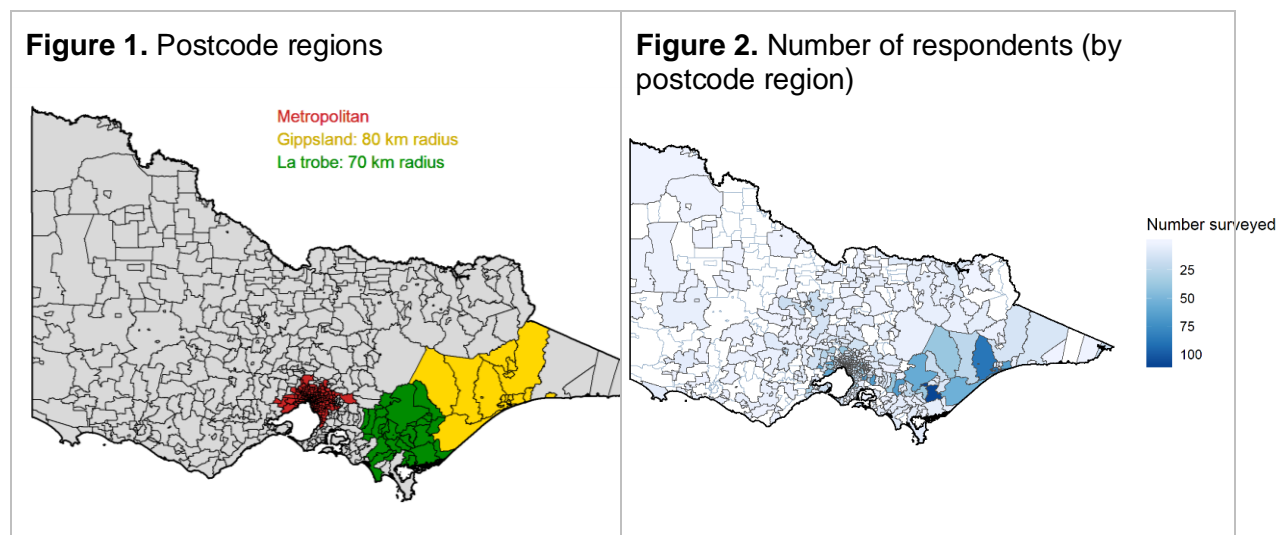
The survey was conducted online and contained 10 questions, including both closed and open-ended questions. Survey questions were designed to capture key information from respondents to help gauge support for the Plan and its key elements, and included questions aimed at collecting:

- Fisher demographics;
- Fisher profile, including avidity and species targeted;
- Fishing motivation and satisfaction; and
- Attitudinal data on level of support for the black bream management changes and other key strategies for restoring recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes.

Sample size

A total of 4,338 people completed the survey. Given this sample size and the most recent estimate of the total population of Victorian recreational fishers, the results of the survey can be considered with a high level of confidence as broadly representative of the views of Victoria's recreational fishing community.

Figures 1 and 2 map number of responses by postcode region. Postcode regions have been established to compare responses by region¹. The number of resident respondents by postcode is represented in Figure 2.



¹ La Trobe and Gippsland have been identified by distance between the centroid of the Traralgon postcode for La Trobe and Bairnsdale for Gippsland.

KEY FINDINGS

The figures below represent the key findings from the survey:

- A large majority of respondents (82.1%) support the proposed introduction of a 'slot limit' for black bream.
- A large majority of respondents (79.2%) support proposed reduction in the black bream bag limit from 10 to 5 fish per person, per day.
- Approximately 73% of respondents believe a reduction in the bag limit for black bream should apply on a state-wide basis in all Victorian waters, as opposed to solely in Gippsland Lakes.
- Respondents ranked (in order of importance) improving waterway health and flows, fish habitat improvements and restoration and fish stocking trials as the most important actions for restoring the Gippsland Lakes to a recreational fishing mecca.
- Almost half (47.4%) of respondents sat somewhere on the spectrum of being satisfied with their overall fishing experience during 2019 (being either very satisfied or satisfied). ~14% of respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Fisher profile

Fishers were asked a number of questions relating to their fishing activities, including fishing avidity (number of times fished in the Gippsland Lakes during 2019), method of fishing (boat or land-based), fishing motivation and species targeted. The survey results indicate that:

- The top 3 motivations for fishing in the Gippsland Lakes were all non-catch related, including (in order of importance) to be outdoors and to relax (of equal importance) and to be with friends and family. Fishing as part of a fishing club activity, for competition or for food were the least importance angler motivations for fishing (Figure 3).
- 70% of respondents fished in the Gippsland Lakes some time during 2019 (30% of respondents didn't fish in the Gippsland Lakes at all during 2019). The majority of respondents fished between 2-5 times during 2019 (see Figure 4).
- Most fishers undertake land-based fishing (~40%), 37.7% fish both from land and a boat, and 22.6% fish solely from a boat.
- Fishers indicated that dusky flathead are the most preferred species to catch (71.6% of respondents selected this as one of their preferred species), followed by black bream (63%) and King George whiting (53%).

Figure 3. Motivations for fishing in the Gippsland Lakes (number of respondents)

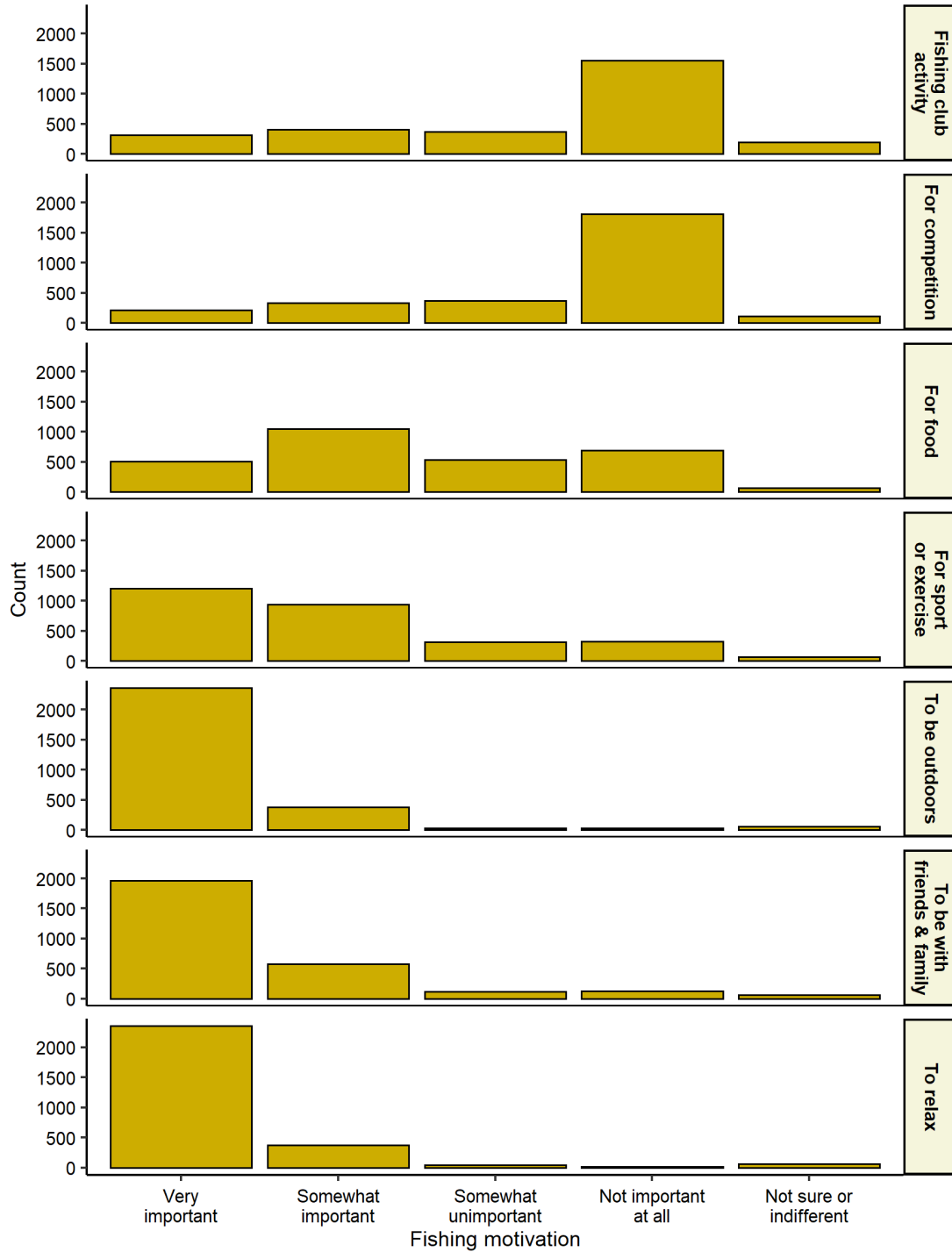
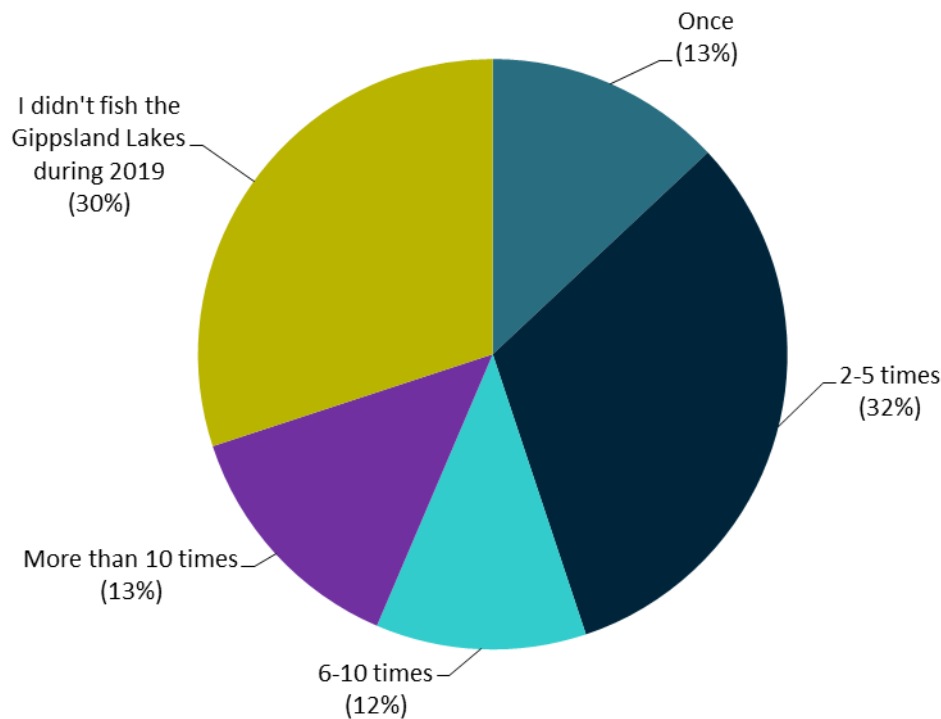


Figure 4. Fishing avidity in the Gippsland Lakes, 2019 (% respondents)



Support for changes to black bream fishery regulations

Overall, a large majority of respondents (~80%) were in support of the proposed changes to black bream fishery regulations (see Figure 5 below). This included a high level of support for both the introduction of a 'slot limit' (49.8% strongly agreed and 32.3% agreed) and a reduction in the bag limit from 10 fish to 5 fish per person, per day (47.2% strongly agreed and 32% agreed). The level of support was slightly higher for the introduction of a slot limit via a maximum size limit for black bream when compared with a reduction in the bag limit.

When the survey results were analysed according to those who fish for black bream, the number of respondents who were strongly supportive of the introduction of a maximum size limit grew slightly to 52.21%.

An analysis of the level of support relative to fishing avidity in the Gippsland Lakes indicated a trend towards a higher level of support for revising black bream regulations (particularly a maximum size limit) for those with a higher level of avidity.

Those whose residential postcodes were in the Gippsland Lakes region (Figure 1) were generally in stronger agreement with changes to black bream regulations than those residing in the La Trobe, Metropolitan Melbourne or elsewhere in regional Victoria (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Level of support for changes to black bream regulations (% respondents)

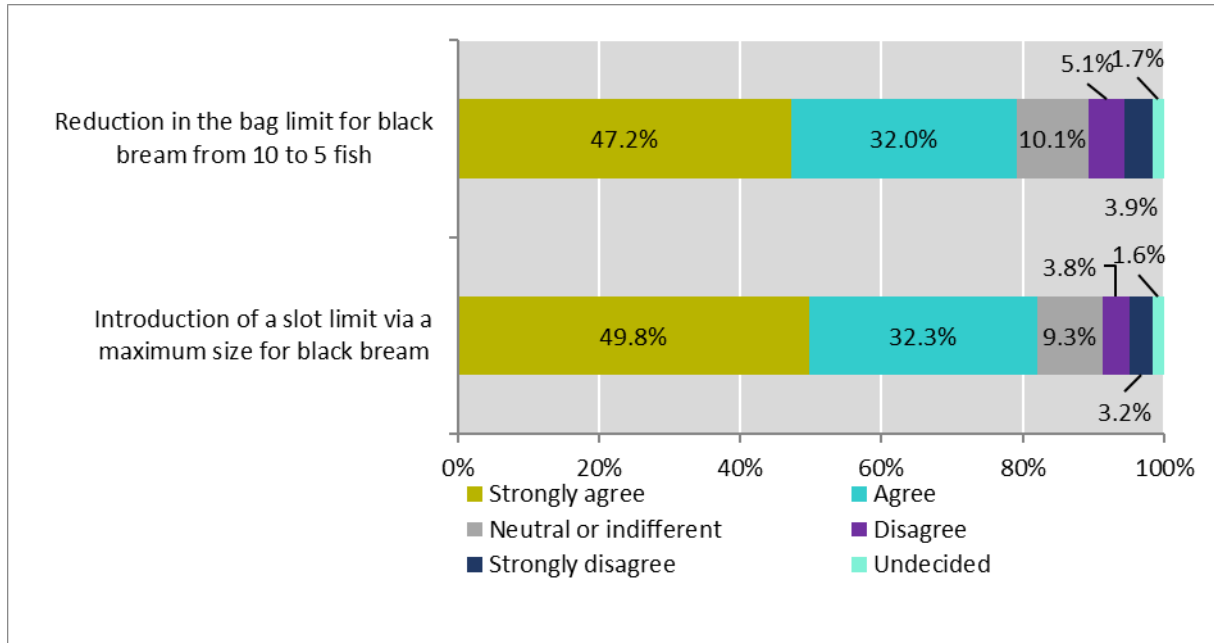
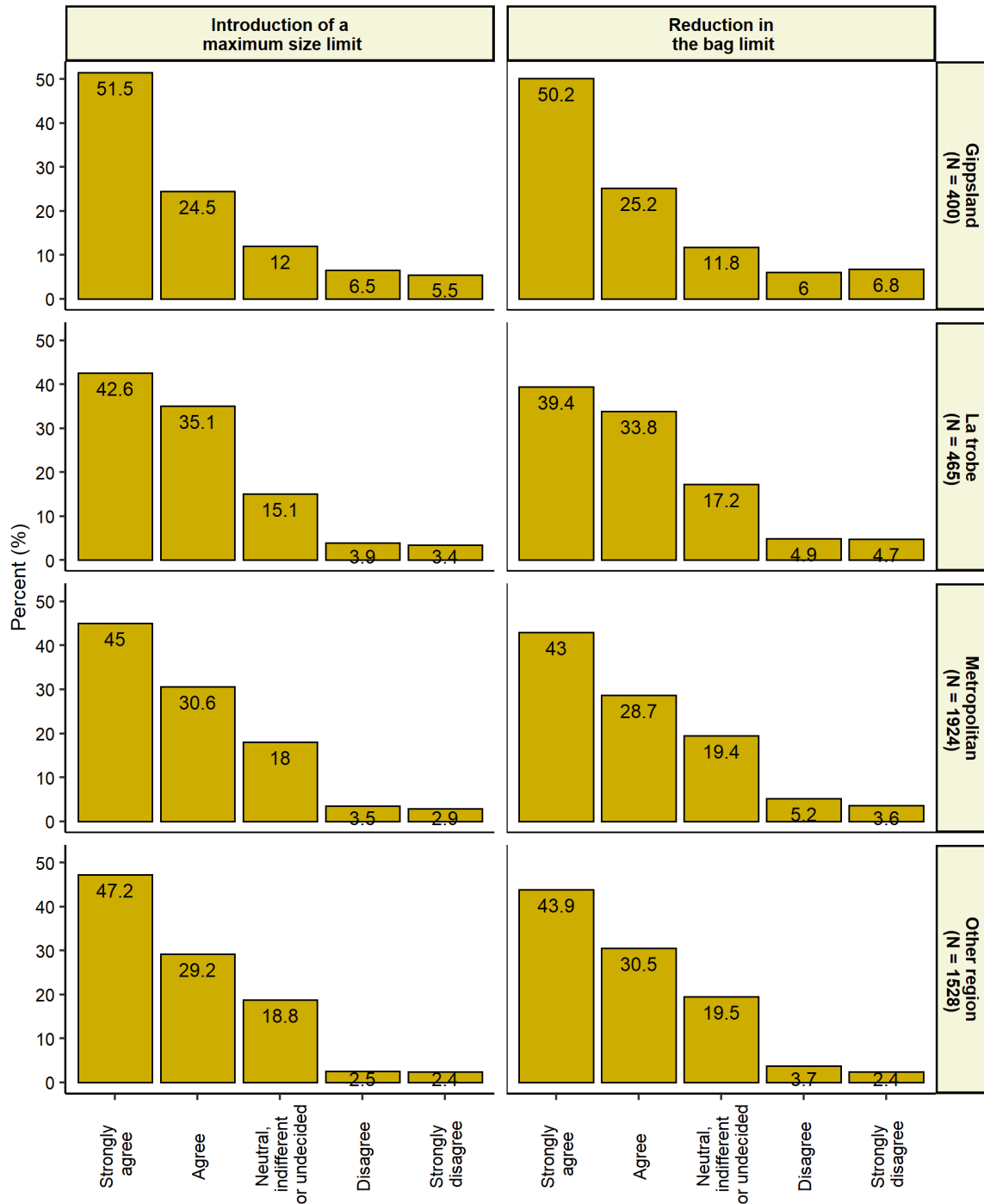


Figure 6. View on changes to black bream management (% respondents, by region)

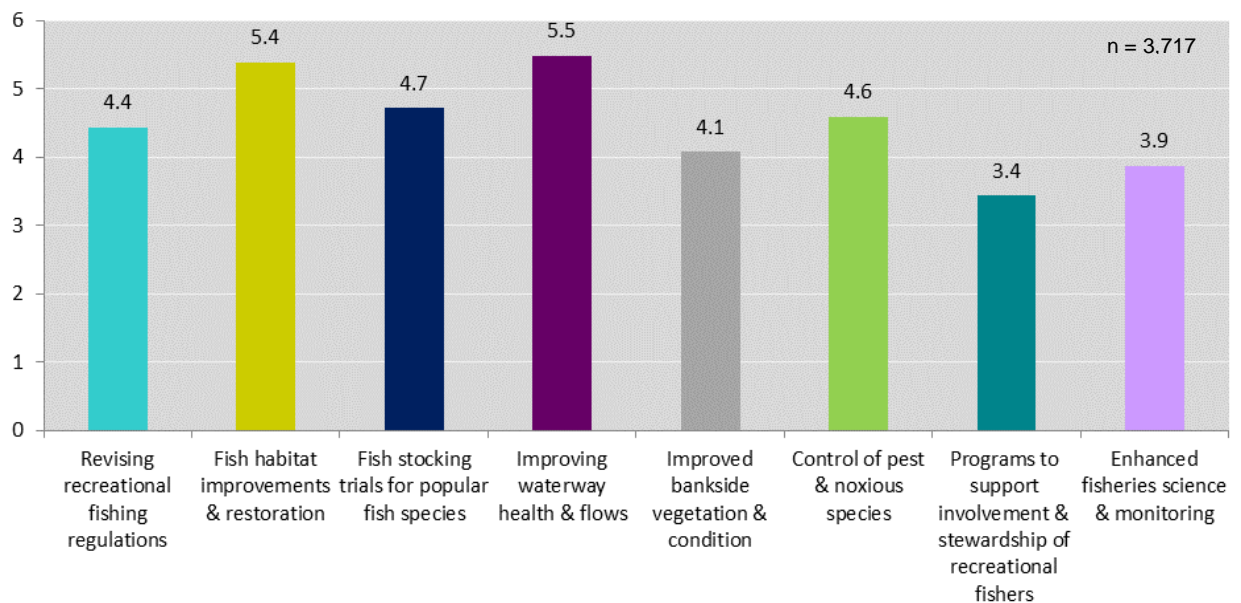


Priority restoration strategies

Respondents were asked to rank a number of different initiatives for restoring recreational fishing in the Gippsland Lakes. The mean scores for each of the actions are summarised in Figure 7 below. Improving waterway health and flows is the most highly ranked action, with over 22% of respondents ranking this as the most important action and highest priority for restoring fishing in Gippsland Lakes. In order of importance, the following represents the ranking of each action:

1. Improving waterway health and flows;
2. Fish habitat improvements and restoration;
3. Fish stocking trials;
4. Control of pest and noxious species;
5. Revising recreational fishing regulations (including bag and size limits for key recreational fish species);
6. Improving bankside condition and vegetation;
7. Enhanced fisheries science and monitoring;
8. Programs to support involvement and stewardship by recreational fishers and the community in recovering the Gippsland Lakes recreational fishery.

Figure 7. Importance of actions to restore recreational fishing (mean score)



Fishing satisfaction

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with their overall fishing experience specific to the Gippsland Lakes during 2019. The survey results indicate that approximately half (~47%) of respondents sat somewhere on the spectrum of being satisfied with their overall fishing experience (being either very satisfied or satisfied). Approximately 14% of respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their fishing experience.

Figure 8. Level of satisfaction with fishing in the Gippsland Lakes, 2019 (% respondents)

