

# Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee

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## Chair's Summary – Meeting #6

The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee held its sixth meeting on Friday 21 May 2021 online via Microsoft Teams. Key matters for discussion at this meeting included the fishery's boundary, the ESD risk assessment and research priorities. The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) also provided an update on the June 2020 Fisheries Notice. Key discussions and outcomes from that meeting were as follows:

### 1. Boundary of the Corner Inlet fishery

- On request, the VFA provided some key principles that may support its decision making on the commercial fishers' proposal to extend the Corner Inlet boundary. This included benefits vs impacts associated with shifting the boundary in the context of key environmental, economic and social values.
- The VFA noted that increasing or expanding commercial net fishing to areas where it is currently limited could harm the social licence for the industry. While there is no data on rec fishing activity in the proposed expansion area outside the Inlet, there is some anecdotal evidence available (e.g. Fisheries Officer observations).
- The potential for spread of commercial fishing effort is still largely unknown. Commercial representatives advised they would report back on the proposed level of fishing effort outside the entrances.
- While it is understood the Corner Inlet Fisheries Habitat Association (CIFHA) support the boundary change proposal, it was noted that consultation with other licence classes that could potentially be affected has not occurred by SIV or the VFA to date. The VFA agreed to review catch and effort information outside the entrances to further understand potential impact.
- The VFA will also consult AFMA on this proposal as it would have implications for the Offshore Constitutional Settlement agreements between Victoria and the Commonwealth.
- There is a variety of views on this proposal and not yet a Steering Committee position on this matter.

### 2. Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) risk assessment

- A summary of the draft extreme and high risks and potential management responses were provided for discussion at meeting. Examples of management responses proposed by the VFA include:
  - to develop and implement a bycatch monitoring program to understand the level of bycatch and discard mortality for rec and commercial fisheries;
  - to help promote a sustainable fishery through a potential Hooked on Fishing festival and Vic Fish Kids events in future at Corner Inlet;
  - to implement electronic catch and effort reporting for the commercial fishery to enable more responsive decision making and efficient collection of data.
- SIV noted there appears to be more of a focus on risks associated with social licence of the commercial fishery when compared to recreational. Recreational fishing representatives noted that this was common for fishery management plans given the nature of each sector and believe the social licence of the commercial sector is the priority in Corner Inlet at present.
- There was in-principle support from the Committee on the ESD response table and this will now be incorporated into drafting of the management plan.

### 3. Research priorities

- The VFA prepared a list of what it believes are the current research priorities for the fishery. In summary, these relate to improving understanding of:
  - flathead stocks
  - recreational fishing activity in the area, and
  - bycatch for both rec and commercial fishing (noting that some previous work has already been conducted for commercial seine netting).
- The VFA is keen to engage more closely with licence holders around research priorities to hear what they want to see focused on in future. *Note: The licence levy for research is \$21,000 per year across the commercial fishery (approx. \$1,170 per licence).*

### 4. June 2021 Fisheries Notice

- The VFA is commencing consultation on replacing the 2020 Fisheries Notice. The two rules introduced in June last year have only been in place for 11 months (with only ~9 months of data available due to the delay in catch and effort returns).
- Total catch has come down from the recent historical high (in the previous fishing season) to what appears to be normal levels for the fishery, indicating the original Fisheries Notice has been effective. Data confirms total seine net shots have come down as intended, while total mesh net effort has increased. However, instances of very long soak times (e.g. >18 hours) had reduced significantly across the fishery and indicates the single gear use rule is effective in that regard.

- The VFA noted that there has not previously been an incentive for fishers to become an operator on more than one Corner Inlet licence. However, due to current limitations on seine shots and use of one type of gear at a time, there is now an incentive to do so for those who want to fish more and this has recently occurred.
- Industry members would consider if property rights and licensing regimes needed further attention by the Steering Committee or by industry/VFA.
- While there is currently no rules against becoming an operator on a second licence in Corner Inlet, the VFA noted that separation of trips is important to support effective and efficient compliance activity and so there is no mixing and misreporting of catch between licences.
- It was noted that fishers' ability to operate two licences in Corner Inlet and the potential impact this may cause on the fishery's social licence is yet to be fully understood.

## **5. Other matters**

### **5.1 Aligning recreational and commercial fishing interests**

- Joanne Butterworth-Gray (SIV) proposed to independently facilitate a workshop to explore common goals of the fishery and build common interests between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors. This could help inform worthwhile initiatives that have been discussed such as a Code of Practice or Memorandum of Understanding, and future investment opportunities. FutureFish supports this idea. VRFish also supports the workshop idea and has separately noted that it believes the level of rec fisher dissatisfaction with current commercial fishing practices (not all operators) is growing.

### **5.2 Recreational fishing controls**

- While the Committee is generally supportive of current recreational fishing management arrangements, some members raised individual concerns with the following:
  - King George whiting minimum size limit
  - Recreational fishers taking bag limits on behalf of minors who are on the boat but not personally fishing
  - Repeated fishing trips to illegally take multiple bag limits
  - Limited hand-held spear fishing area
- The VFA noted the concerns and the recent Fisheries Regulations review where a number of changes to recreational fishing management arrangements such as boat limits were considered but not supported.

### **5.3 Committee governance and proposal for future open forum in Corner Inlet**

- The Chair agreed that the VFA would run any future requests for observers at future meetings by the Committee beforehand. The VFA also noted it could hold an open forum or pop-up in Corner Inlet for all licence holders to be able to ask any questions of the Committee (possibly in July). It will work with the Committee to decide on how this will be best run.

### **5.4 New items presented by guest observers**

- The Chair accepted Bill and Damien Knibbs to attend the last 15 minutes of the meeting in order to present two new proposals for the Committee's consideration:
  - That all licence holders/operators join up for a single association in the interest of the commercial fishery's future
  - That commercial licence holders not work during the day on public holidays that fall on a Friday and only work after 5pm on any public holidays that fall on a Monday – in order to improve image of the commercial sector and not to be seen.
- CIFHA representatives noted it has previously invited Corner Inlet licence holders and their operators to join the existing association and maintains its approach to welcome any new members, as it is in their interest and in the best interest of the fishery to join.
- It was noted that there has been discussion with various licence holders and at CIFHA on the temporal closure ideas already and it was clear there was not adequate support to remove more fishing days for the year. They noted commercial fishers' role to feed the public particularly around public holidays and the need for this option to maintain their business, particularly when the weather is not favourable for so many days of the year. FutureFish noted that weekends are already a significant closure for the commercial sector.

The next meeting of the Committee is planned to take place in June 2021. It is possible this will be followed by a final face-to-face meeting and open forum in July 2021, prior to finalizing the draft management plan.