

ROCK LOBSTER & GIANT CRAB RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (RLRAG)

2026/27 GIANT CRAB FISHERY TACC RECOMMENDATION

The Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG) met on the 27th of February 2026 to review the 2024/25 Giant Crab Stock Assessment Report. Based on the results of this assessment and application of the new Harvest Strategy, the RLRAG provides the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) with the following recommendations on setting the 2026/27 Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC).

NEW HARVEST STRATEGY ARRANGEMENTS

A new harvest strategy was developed during 2024/25 and formally introduced in June 2025. The new harvest strategy maintains the fundamental principles of the previous strategy whilst offering further scope for development within the fishery. It introduces a three-tiered system which allows greater capacity for growth with improved data collection. As greater data collection and verification goals are reached, there is greater capacity for TACC increases.

RECENT FISHERY TRENDS

The TACC for the Giant Crab Fishery was set at 10.5 tonnes between 2014/15 to 2020/21. Following a correction in effort in early 2021, there was a fundamental change in the recent CPUE trend. The TACC was subsequently reduced to 7.5t for the 2021/22 quota period and remained at this level through the 2024/25 season. Following this reduction, the CPUE recovered considerably reaching 1.10kg per adjusted pot-day in 2022/23. While CPUE reduced considerably to 0.66 kg per adjusted pot-day in 2024/25, this was not considered to be reflective of biomass due to giant crab being a slow growing species. In 2025/26, the TACC was set at 8.5 tonnes under the new harvest strategy's recommended starting TACC, and in recognition of the recent recovery in the fishery.

2024/25 STOCK ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

The CPUE in 2024/25 was 1.16kg per adjusted pot-day which is the highest on record since 2008/09. The recent high-level of variability in CPUE is unlikely to be reflective of changes in the biomass. For this reason, a three-year average has been introduced in the new harvest strategy. While the mean weight increased slightly, it has remained relatively consistent to previous seasons.

Under the Harvest Strategy, the fishery is currently operating under Level 1 and is not eligible for increases in the TACC. Further, the current three-year average CPUE is below the target reference point. As such, the harvest strategy outcome is for the TACC to remain at 8.5 tonnes.

RLRAG RECOMMENDATION

The RLRAG endorses the harvest strategy and supports its application in setting the 2026/27 TACC at 8.5 tonnes. The RLRAG noted that the recent variability in TACC is unlikely to be reflective of the biomass and noted the harvest strategy's use of a three-year average.

The RLRAG further noted that in order to progress to Level 2 of the harvest strategy, data collection must include verified length-frequency sampling and verified logbook data. The latter is currently achieved under the Electronic Monitoring System.