

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.

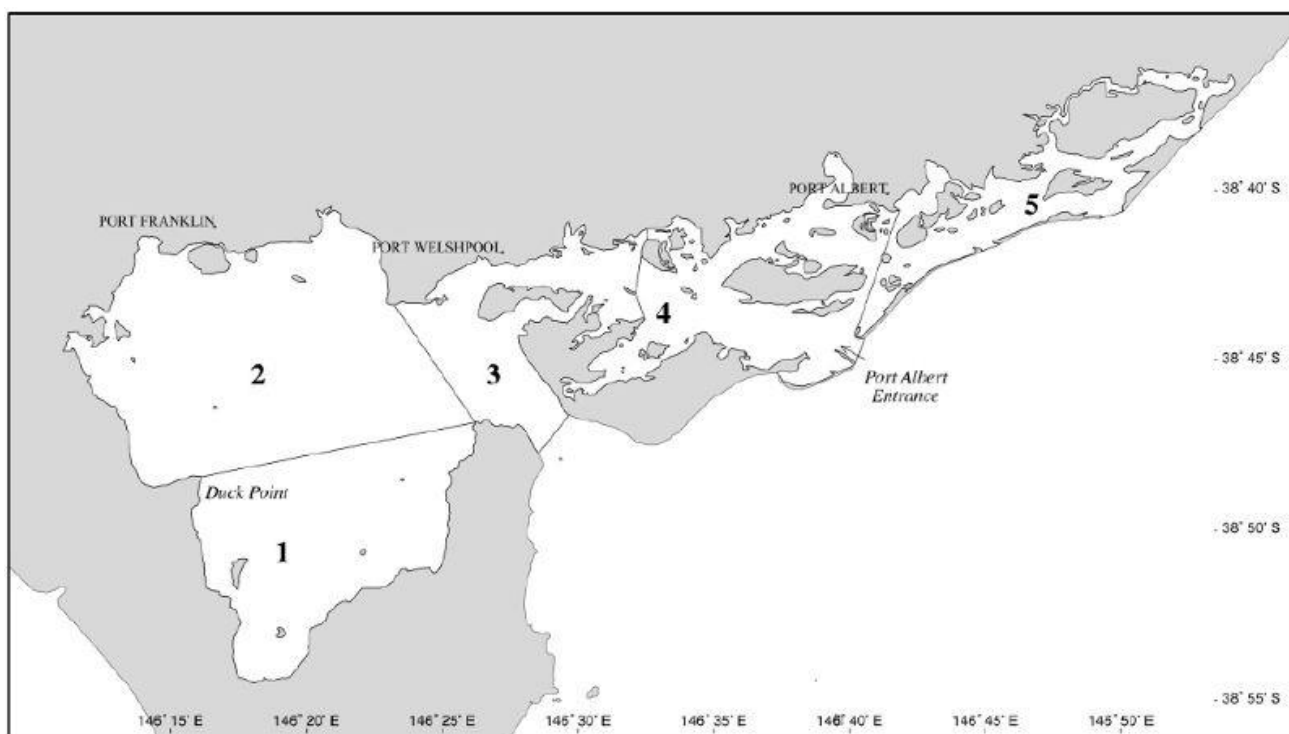


Figure 1. Map of Corner Inlet fishery. The fishery includes areas numbered 1 to 5, however fishing is prohibited within the Corner Inlet Marine National Park (not shown in this image, refer to vfa.vic.gov.au/marineparks for details).

What is the draft Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan?

The draft management plan specifies 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 draft management plan?

The draft Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan has been prepared by Victorian Fisheries Authority 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 VFA staff. 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

What are the objectives for the fishery?

The draft 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: Ensure optimal economic utilisation of the Corner Inlet resource
- Objective 5: Cost-effective and participatory management

What actions are being proposed?

There are a total of 49 actions included in the draft management plan. Some of the key initiatives proposed include:

- establish an ongoing, stakeholder-based Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (MAC)
- 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 draft management plan.

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

The draft plan maintains all existing recreational fishing arrangements and access, with the exception of one proposal relating to the recreational bag limit for shellfish in the Corner Inlet fishery. A reduction from 5 litres to 2 litres per person per day of shellfish is proposed. There are no other proposed changes to any species, bag or size limits specific to the Corner Inlet fishery.

The proposed change to the shellfish bag limit, including for cockles, 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 and is subject to consideration of feedback received during the consultation process.

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

The management plan proposes to transition the commercial fishery to electronic reporting from 2022/23. This will mean commercial fishers will 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 draft 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 draft management plan or you can view the full Fisheries Notices on the VFA website.

These Notices are still relatively new with the second Notice only introduced in March 2021 and the continued effectiveness of the Notices 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?

A key action of the draft management plan is a proposal to establish an ongoing, stakeholder-based Corner Inlet Fishery Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC) from 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 will seek expressions of interest from any recreational 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 draft 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 draft management plan?

A copy of the draft management plan can be found at: www.vfa.vic.gov.au/cornerinletplan

How do I make a submission?

To have your say, you can make a submission¹ by **27 February 2022**. Submissions should be sent via email to Lachlan.Smith@vfa.vic.gov.au

¹ **Please note all submissions received in relation to the consultation being conducted by VFA will be published on the VFA website. In making a submission, the person will be consenting to their submission, including their name, being published on the VFA website for 90 days or more from the conclusion of the consultative process. Other personal details from such as address or email address will not be made publicly available. A person may make indicate they wish for their submission to be made confidential and in doing so, the details will not be made publicly available at the end of the public consultation process.*

When will a final plan be declared?

All feedback received via submissions will be considered by the VFA, in consultation with the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee. A report will be provided to the Minister for Fishing and Boating along with a final Plan for consideration and declaration by the Minister. It is anticipated a final plan could be declared as soon as the second quarter of 2022, however this timeline is subject to change.