



25 February 2022

GLaWAC submission to the draft Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Fisheries Authority Draft Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan.

The Gunaikurnai are the recognised rights holders over about 1.33 million hectares in Gippsland – spanning from Warragul in the west, to the Snowy River in the east, and from the Great Divide in the north to the coast in the south, including 200 metres of offshore sea territory. Corner Inlet is an area of immense significance to the Gunaikurnai people, with many stories surrounding the marine and coastal landscapes around Wilson’s Promontory, reflecting right back to many thousands of years ago when Victoria was connected to Tasmania and sea levels were an estimated 50 metres lower than they are today.

This submission is being made by the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), as the prescribed body corporate on behalf of the Gunaikurnai people, for the purposes of the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth). GLaWAC is a Registered Aboriginal Party for the purposes of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria). The State of Victoria has also entered into Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the Gunaikurnai People. The Recognition and Settlement Agreement, executed under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010, affords Gunaikurnai people rights relating to the use of public land within their Agreement area.

GLaWAC supports sustainable fishing, managing the resource so there is plenty of fish for all, now and for the future. This is how the Gunaikurnai managed their resources for many thousands of years – not taking more than is needed, and leaving enough for others.

Fishing at Corner Inlet started many thousands of years ago when the Gunaikurnai people traversed the area on bark canoes after sea levels increased and the low plains – including the Corner Inlet area – were submerged. GLaWAC is pleased that the Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan acknowledges the importance of the Corner Inlet area and the fish it supports to Traditional Owners who have long standing connection to the area. GLaWAC is looking forward to collaborating with the VFA on how protecting the cultural values and uses of this area can be achieved as the plan is implemented.

It’s important to distinguish between the cultural values of the Inlet, and its fish, for Traditional Owners, versus the enjoyment of fishing for the broader community. Fishing in the Inlet for Traditional owners is much more than a recreational activity, rather it is customary practice at the backbone of many cultural values, including place, practice, social, well-being, identity, custodial, relational and future use, ie economic. We would ask the final Corner Inlet Plan reflects this distinction, and we would extend an offer to work with the VFA to assist in the articulation of this.

The appropriate recognition throughout the plan of the custodial obligations of Traditional Owners to care for Country, and the cultural values and uses objectives that this embodies applies to the whole of the document, and we would ask for these small but important changes be made accordingly.

As an example, the following paragraph from the Plan could be tweaked, to provide more clarity.

Current:

“The objectives, strategies and actions in the Plan provide for continued use and improved management of the Corner Inlet fishery resource, in a manner that is effective, efficient and ecologically sustainable. They also ensure fishing practices are responsible and respectful of community values and will help maintain public support for utilisation of the shared resource.” (p.8)

Proposed:

“The objectives, strategies and actions in the Plan provide for continued use and improved management of the Corner Inlet fishery resource, in a manner that is effective, efficient and ecologically sustainable. They also ensure fishing practices are responsible and respectful of Traditional Owner cultural values – tangible and intangible, and to community values and will help maintain public support for sustainable utilisation of the shared resource.”

This small change acknowledges the importance of cultural values, distinguishes cultural values from what the broader community may want for the area, and emphasizes the Plan’s commitment to sustainability.

GLaWAC requests that the Corner Inlet Plan objectives include an objective specifically for cultural values. This inclusion will assist in driving actions and reporting and strengthen the collaboration between Traditional Owners and the VFA. An example could be:

‘The fishery will through its strategic direction, management and operation, ensure activities incorporate implementation actions to actively drive protection of tangible and intangible Traditional Owner cultural heritage and values.’

GLaWAC is not in a position to make comment on the fish stock resources of the Inlet as presented in the Plan, but would ask for more information in regard to flathead, a culturally important species and currently undefined/not assessed. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss means to assess this fish in the Inlet with you.

More broadly, we would like to see an action for you and GLaWAC to work together to monitor impacts on fish stocks from a cultural lens. GLaWAC notes that the VFA encourages recreational fishers to record information on their catch, and also conducts surveys on main boat ramps. While these collections help gauge angler satisfaction, GLaWAC would look to the strategy to consider ongoing monitoring that tracks the health and sustainability of culturally important fish resources. This in turn would help drive management actions to ensure sustainability of these resources.

In closing, GLaWAC welcomes the opportunity for collaboration into the management of the Corner Inlet fishery, and to work with the VFA to protect tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites, culturally important species, and enable the objectives of the Gunaikurnai for this important area.

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