



Statement of Expectations

1 January 2018 – 30 June 2020

Evaluation Report

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Contents

Introduction	3
The Minister's Statement of Expectations for the VFA	3
Evaluation objectives	4
Evaluation Methodology.....	4
Process Evaluation – Key Findings	4
Outcome Evaluation – Key Findings.....	6
Conclusion.....	15

Introduction

The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) was created on 1 July 2017 by establishing the then Fisheries Victoria as a statutory authority under the *Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016*. The VFA is the regulatory body responsible for managing Victoria's fisheries resources to ensure their ongoing sustainability by licensing commercial fishing and aquaculture activities and regulating the take of freshwater and marine species by recreational and commercial fishers. The VFA is accountable to the Victorian Government, through the Minister for Fishing and Boating, for fulfilling its statutory responsibilities in line with government policy and within an appropriate governance framework.

As a Victorian State Government regulator, the VFA is subject to the requirements of the Government's *Statement of Expectations Framework for Regulators* (the SOE Framework). The SOE Framework was developed to promote greater efficiency and effectiveness in the administration and enforcement of regulation, and forms part of the Government's program to reduce red tape.

The SOE Framework requires that all Victorian business regulators have a Statement of Expectations issued by the relevant Minister. The Ministerial Statement of Expectations (the SOE) is a formal and public statement that establishes an agreement between the responsible Minister and their regulators regarding performance expectations to improve regulator outcomes and reduce costs on regulated parties. The regulator's response to the SOE, by way of letter to the Minister, outlines how the regulator will meet the expectations set out in the SOE.

Under the SOE Framework, there is a mandatory requirement to evaluate the SOEs of regulators to assess how well the SOE is contributing to better regulatory practice.

The primary purpose of this report is to provide the results of the evaluation of the VFA's *Ministerial Statement of Expectations 1 January 2018 – 30 June 2020*.

The Ministerial Statement of Expectations for the VFA

On 1 January 2018, the Minister for Fishing and Boating (then Agriculture) issued the VFA with a SOE for the period to 30 June 2020, which related to the following areas:

1. Timeliness
2. Risk-based strategies
3. Compliance-related assistance and advice
4. Incentive-based regulations
5. Cooperation among regulators
6. Stakeholder consultation and engagement
7. Accountability and transparency
8. Clear and consistent regulatory activities

At the time of the SOE's creation, the VFA reported to the Minister through the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR). In the machinery of government changes resulting from the 2018 State election, the VFA was transferred to the portfolio of the Department of Transport (DoT).

Evaluation objectives

This report evaluates the VFA's SOE in accordance with the Department of Treasury and Finance's *Guidelines for Evaluation of Statements of Expectations for Regulators* (the DTF Guidelines) in relation to:

- The VFA's SOE development process.
- The delivery of the improvements and targets described in the VFA's SOE response.
- The impact the SOE has made towards achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the VFA's administration and enforcement of regulation.

Evaluation Methodology

The DTF Guidelines specify that evaluations be comprised of two components:

1. A process evaluation, that is, an evaluation of the process used to develop the VFA's SOE, which asks:
 - How aligned is the VFA's SOE to the SOE Framework; and
 - How appropriate was the process for developing the SOE?
2. An outcome evaluation, that is, an evaluation of the VFA's performance in delivering the SOE on time and on budget.

The evaluation was based on information gathered from:

- The VFA's Annual Reports;
- Evaluation reports and independent reviews;
- Internal project material;
- The VFA's website, media releases and other published material; and
- Consultations with project leaders and program managers.

Analysis of the data enabled an assessment of how the VFA prepared the SOE and SOE response letter and evaluated performance on the status and quality of implementation against the targets and improvements in the response letter.

As prescribed by the DTF Guidelines, the evaluation was conducted by an internal team from within the VFA's Office of the CEO.

Process Evaluation – Key Findings

How aligned is the VFA's SOE to the SOE Framework?

The SOE Framework consists of three mandatory elements of good regulatory practice and outlines a further six as recommended and suggested minimum standards. The VFA's SOE is aligned with the SOE Framework as it comprises all mandatory and recommended elements and four of the five suggested elements (as evidenced in the following table).

Elements of Good Regulatory Practice		Is the VFA SOE consistent?
Mandatory	Timeliness	Y
	Risk-based strategies	Y
	Compliance-related assistance and advice	Y
Recommended	Incentive-based regulations	Y
Suggested	Role clarity	N – not considered necessary
	Cooperation among regulators	Y
	Stakeholder consultation and engagement	Y
	Accountability and transparency	Y
	Clear and consistent regulatory activities	Y

How appropriate was the process for developing the SOE?

The SOE Framework outlines key steps for developing the SOE letter and regulator response. The evaluation determined that the VFA complied with these steps by:

- Undertaking a Regulator Self-Assessment against the elements of good regulatory practice. Previous SOE's developed for the then Fisheries Victoria were used to establish a baseline for performance and potential for future performance goals.
- Consulting with the Minister's Office, the (then) Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources and relevant stakeholders to develop actions to achieve the improvements and targets described in the SOE.
- Publishing the SOE and the SOE Response Letter on the VFA's website.
- Reporting regularly on progress through the VFA's publicly available Annual Reports.

The evaluation determined that the VFA produced an SOE and response with a strong focus on improving delivery to the community and meeting the SOE Framework's objective to reduce the regulatory burden on stakeholders.

To what extent did the VFA deliver the improvements and targets established in the SOE and the VFA's response?

Over the life of the SOE, the VFA met the required targets established in the SOE Response Letter.

Outcome Evaluation – Key Findings

Key Evaluation Question: What difference did the SOE make towards achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the administration and enforcement of regulations?

1. Timeliness

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the sunseting <i>Fisheries Regulations 2009</i> and the <i>Fisheries (Fees, Royalties and Levies) Regulations 2008</i> to identify areas where regulatory burden could be reduced. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recommendations for regulatory burden reduction to be informed by stakeholder consultation and a risk-assessment of fisheries management and compliance issues. • Consider alternative regulatory tools, including incentive-based regulation where appropriate. • Explore the use of e-technologies to reduce the time, cost and administrative burden associated with the sale of recreational fishing licences (RFL) and other public facing services. • Consider how the current catch and effort reporting arrangements for commercial fisheries could be improved in the future to minimise burden to fishers and ensure the most appropriate information is obtained for fishery management purposes.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review (jointly with DEDJTR) the sunseting <i>Fisheries Regulations 2009</i> to identify areas where regulatory burden could be reduced. • Plan, build & implement an online method for agents selling recreational fishing licences on behalf of the VFA, replacing the current paper-based system and significantly reducing agent burden and VFA costs. • Transition key commercial fisheries (abalone, rock lobster, giant crab, pipi and wrasse) to a single electronic catch reporting system.

The evaluation found evidence that the VFA has taken significant steps to reduce the regulatory burden placed on the recreational and commercial sectors over the life of the SOE.

- Sunseting of the *Fisheries Regulations 2009* was extended from Feb 2019 to February 2020. Consultation on proposed regulations began in September 2019 and concluded at the end of October 2019. The new regulations, *Fisheries Regulations 2019*, came into effect on 1 February 2020.
- The VFA has implemented an online platform for agents selling recreational fishing licences. After the completion of a campaign to encourage and transition agents across to the platform, around 85% of sales now occur online. This has significantly reduced the burden of the manual paper-based system for both the agents and the VFA.
- Over the life of the SOE, the VFA has designed and built an online electronic catch reporting system to replace the paper logbooks and receipts used in Victoria’s commercial fisheries. The system is available to fishers as an app accessible via a smartphone or tablet and provides an end-to-end service for reporting catch, fishing effort and product movement. The electronic system has created efficiencies by reducing the time and effort required to complete catch reports and has made the availability of data immediate (previously, this process could take up to two months). By the completion of the SOE, the system will have been implemented in the abalone, rock lobster and giant crab fisheries, with the pipi and wrasse fisheries to be transitioned in 2021/22.

2. Risk-based Strategies

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to deliver existing management plans for key fisheries throughout 2018-2020, including the abalone, rock lobster, giant crab and eel fisheries. Implement the harvest strategy for the wrasse fishery and management plan for freshwater fisheries and take a risk-based approach in the development of any future fishery management plans to ensure that plans are developed on a priority basis for key or high-risk fisheries. • Investigate ways of collecting better catch, effort and value data from the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. • Conduct a Victorian recreational fishing survey within the next 12 months and report on the outcomes of the survey within three months of its completion, • Continue to implement the VFA’s intelligence-informed risk-based compliance model, balancing a focus on areas of highest risk, while retaining a base model of cover across all fisheries to maintain community confidence and create a general deterrence. • Contribute to the safety of all Victorians through minimising the risk of shark hazards in Victorian waters, promoting the safe use of fisheries resources and acting as a support agency for aquatic related emergencies under the <i>Emergency Management Act 2013</i>.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a recreational fishing survey and report on outcomes within three months of completion. • Implement a Freshwater Fishery Management Plan. • Monitor the performance of the Wrasse Fishery in accordance with the harvest strategy.

In March-April 2018, the VFA conducted an online recreational fishing survey seeking feedback from fishers on a range of topics to allow the VFA to make more informed choices about improving recreational fishing opportunities across the State and to invest in the right areas. The results of the survey were published on the VFA’s website. https://vfa.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/437750/Vic-Fisheries-Authority-Licence-Survey-final-report-1Oct18.pdf

The evaluation concluded that the VFA performs strongly in developing and delivering risk-based strategies. The VFA applies a risk-based approach to the management of Victoria’s marine and freshwater resources, which is evidenced by the priorities of the *VFA Strategic Plan 2019-2024*; primarily, *Focus Area 1 – Sustainable and healthy fisheries*.

Over the life of the SOE, the VFA has continued to deliver existing management plans for the abalone, rock lobster, giant crab and eel fisheries. The Freshwater Fishery Management Plan was released in October 2018 and is focussed on improving the health of Victoria’s inland fisheries and the habitats that support them. In addition, a management plan has been developed and implemented for the Pipi Fishery, which was established in 2019. The Wrasse Fishery continues to be managed in accordance with the harvest strategy and assessment reports are provided annually. The 2019 assessment of the fishery showed that stocks are being managed sustainably at the current catch rates.

The VFA continues to implement a risk-based approach using intelligence data to determine priority areas for enforcement activity. Over the past three years, the VFA has increased the number of Fisheries Officers employed thereby ensuring a base level of cover is maintained across Victoria. In accordance with the Victorian Government’s *Budget Paper No.3 -Service Delivery*, prioritisation of coverage has been provided for peak periods of fishing activity, such as long weekends and holiday periods.

The VFA leads Government’s response to managing shark hazards in Victoria and educating the community on shark safety. The VFA has published information and advice on shark safety through social and

traditional media platforms and Fisheries Officers have attended community events to promote shark safety and other aquatic safety messages. The VFA has continued to provide support to other Victorian agencies and departments on an as needs basis to assist in aquatic emergency activities. Further, staff have undertaken specialist training in shark tagging and whale disentanglements to assist in research and have provided support for bushfire recovery and relief during the devastating 2020 bushfire season.

The VFA has successfully delivered a range of initiatives aimed at improving the catch, effort and value data from the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. In addition to transitioning Victoria’s high-value commercial fisheries; abalone, rock lobster and giant crab, to electronic catch and effort reporting to replace the paper-based system, the VFA has implemented several electronic data collection platforms for the recreational sector. These include:

- VicRLTag – available as an app, the digital platform allows recreational fishers to record their rock lobster catch and report tag use. The system includes the option for an increased level of data collection through a voluntary ‘citizen science’ program.
- GoFishVic – available as an app, the platform allows ‘citizen scientists’ to record their recreational fishing experience; all data on the location, catch, time spent fishing is recorded, and a complete fishing history is available.

3. Compliance-related assistance and advice

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In dealing with stakeholders, all VFA Fisheries Officers should be helpful, respectful, impartial, proportionate in implementing compliance activities, predictable and transparent. • Continue educational programs that are specifically designed to improve compliance and promote sustainable and responsible fishing. This should include the implementation of initiatives focusing on promoting responsible fishing practices, including the safe use of fisheries resources. These initiatives and educational programs should be targeted at the needs of stakeholders and implemented in an accessible way, that recognises the diversity of fisheries stakeholders. • Engage with stakeholders to seek feedback on the clarity and comprehensiveness of educational programs and guidance material.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop (in consultation with community representatives) new fisheries advisory products targeted at identified high-risk communities. • Review the composition and reach of education programs (including those at the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre) and report back on improvement opportunities, including through use of digital channels.

The evaluation concluded that the VFA has worked extensively with stakeholders from across the community to educate and promote sustainable and responsible fishing practices, which is evidenced through the VFA’s Annual Reports, social media posts and website.

A key role of the VFA’s education team is to increase the awareness and understanding of all Victorians to achieve the sustainable and responsible use of Victoria’s fisheries resources. The team engage with people from all areas of our community and use education techniques that are culturally and age-appropriate, interactive, fun and informative. As an example, in 2018-19, the education team engaged with over 43,300 people:

- 4,392 people from multicultural communities;
- 14,016 children and their families through the *Target One Million Program*;
- 5,214 children through the School Holiday Program at the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre;

- 19,301 school children attending the School Program at the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre; and
- 469 people via general admission at the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre.

Other examples of the VFA’s continued work include:

- Victoria’s *Target One Million* program organises family orientated fishing days, such as the Vic Fish Kids events, to encourage all Victorians to give fishing a go.
- The VFA has worked with multicultural communities to translate the *Recreational Fishing Guide* into Vietnamese and Chinese. Further, as there are around 260 languages spoken by Victorians, the VFA recognised that it was unfeasible to translate the Guide into all languages, so instead created an animated film series to turn the complex messaging into simple, easily digestible imagery.
- To assist beginner fishers, the VFA created a series of guides called *Get Outside Go Fishing*. The series comprises six booklets: Family Fishing Lakes, Western Port, Port Phillip Bay, Gippsland Lakes, North West Victoria, South West Victoria and North East Victoria. The booklets are currently available in simplified Chinese and English and are very popular with families who are keen to try something new and different, while exploring more of Victoria.
- The *Fishing for Culture* program is aimed at educating newly arrived communities to understand recreational fishing rules, why the rules exist and how to fish responsibly.
- To help improve rock fishing safety in our CaLD communities, the VFA developed a simple safety booklet for rock fishers. The booklet covers how to best prepare for rock fishing, what safety gear to take and what to do if swept into the water. The booklet is available in English, simplified Chinese and Vietnamese.
- The VFA developed a range of educational equipment to engage with communities, such as multilingual buckets to collect pipis, multilingual signage installed at beach access points, and an abalone fishing tool that VFA Fisheries Officers could give to fishers whilst also engaging and educating them.

In recognition of the VFA’s work to foster cross-cultural understanding and support for migrants and refugees, in 2019, the VFA was awarded the Police Community Exemplary Award by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The award recognised the VFA’s:

- Commitment to producing information in multiple languages,
- Work with refugee, migrant and at-risk communities to improve their knowledge about fishing rules and to encourage stewardship of natural environments.
- Partnerships with Victoria Police, Fire Rescue Victoria, Parks Victoria and settlement agencies to introduce communities to fishing in a sensitive, culturally safe manner.

4. Incentive-based regulation

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with fishing sectors, consider incentive-based regulatory approaches as a means of reducing compliance costs. Any data collected on fisher behaviour and compliance activities would be used to inform this process.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the feasibility of reducing compliance inspections by introducing a vessel monitoring system for the commercial fishing sector.

In 2019, the VFA implemented the requirement for commercial fishing vessels operating in specified fisheries to have an operational vessel monitoring system (VMS) onboard. VMS is a new technology for many of Victoria’s commercial fishers the VFA worked collaboratively with the industry to implement this change in the abalone, rock lobster, giant crab and Corner Inlet fisheries. VMS will be implemented in the

Western Port/Port Phillip Bay, banded morwong, octopus, sea urchin, and inshore trawl fisheries in the second half of 2020.

5. Cooperation amongst regulators

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with DEDJTR and across Victorian Government agencies to sustainably grow recreational fishing, improve access where appropriate and continue value-adding commercial fisheries. • In relation to aquaculture management, continue to work with DEDJTR, the Commonwealth Government and PrimeSafe Victoria to manage the risks associated with marine biotoxins and to implement relevant export standards and agreements, including the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program. • Share the knowledge and expertise of VFA Fisheries Officers with other DEDJTR and partner agency authorised officers to build a more effective and efficient compliance management system across government. • Continue to assist other regulators, such as the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Environment Protection Authority and Transport Safety Victoria in ensuring fishers comply with relevant environmental and marine safety laws.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, in consultation with recreational fishers and land managers, new habitat and access investment priorities for delivery from 2019-2022. • Collaborate with DELWP Wildlife Officers in ensuring compliance with protected species interaction reporting. • Support Marine Safety Victoria’s program objectives through conducting recreational vessel inspections.

The evaluation concluded that the VFA has and continues to be a leader in collaborating across Victorian government agencies, which is evidenced by the achievements documented in the VFA’s Annual Reports, media releases and social media posts.

Through the *Target One Million* program, the VFA has worked with recreational fishing stakeholders, land managers and Victorian Government agencies to:

- Create new fisheries by stocking at least six million per year in 2019 and 2020 in over 250 waterways around Victoria. This included stocking fish for the first time into urban lakes, which created year-round fishing opportunities for local communities.
- Invest \$3.8 million into 64 projects, which received \$21 million in co-investment, through the Better Fishing Facilities fund to deliver projects to improve recreational fishing access and facilities. Grants of up to \$100,000 were awarded to organisations including Incorporated Fishing Clubs, Crown Land Committees of Management, Local Government Authorities, Water Corporations, Catchment Management Authorities, and other government departments, such as Parks Victoria.

As part of the second phase of *Target One Million*, which was announced as part of the Andrews’ Government 2018 election commitments, the VFA has commenced further work to grow recreational fishing and habitat, including:

- Increase fish stocking to 10 million fish annually by 2020;
- Construct a new \$7 million native fish hatchery in Shepparton to focus on species such as Murray cod and golden perch;

- Phase-out commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes through a compulsory buyout to make the Lakes a recreational fishing haven that will boost tourism and create jobs;
- Allow anglers to use boats and kayaks with electric motors on specified lakes and reservoirs, including Tullaroop, Lauriston, Hepburn, Barkers Creek, Upper Colliban and Malmsbury;
- Allow access for fishing and camping by opening nominated areas of Crown land river frontage;
- Build and/or upgrade a number of fishing platforms and fish cleaning tables with new and improved recreational fishing infrastructure;
- Improve fish habitat in Port Philip Bay by investing in reef development; and
- Invest in science and habitat restoration in the Gippsland Lakes to ensure the environment remains healthy.

In 2017-18, Victorian aquaculture production was estimated at approximately \$58 million dollars, making it at a greater gross value than commercial fishing. The VFA continues to strive to grow this sector and in doing so continues to implement the highest standards for the quality assurance of product. The VFA has strong relationships with PrimeSafe and the Commonwealth Government, which are utilised to ensure export standards are upheld and risks associated with marine biotoxins are negated.

To reinforce the collaboration between VFA Fisheries Officers and DELWP officers for shared issues such as limiting interactions and impacts on protected species, staff from both organisations have undertaken joint training activities, such as whale disentanglements and native fish salvages (moving native fish out of danger from a drying water system). To assist Marine Safety Victoria, the VFA's Fisheries Officers adopted the role of inspecting recreational fishing vessels to ensure they comply with regulations. To assist other Victorian regulators and to share enforcement knowledge and experience across Victoria, the VFA organised and facilitated a National Fisheries Crime Prevention Conference in 2019. A key element of the conference was the development of effective prevention programs that focus on empowering communities and educating to change values, attitudes and behaviours.

6. Stakeholder consultation and engagement

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to actively engage and work with commercial and recreational fishers, aquaculture licence holders and Traditional Owner groups who have a direct interest in decisions that affect their fishing entitlements. • Pursue genuine engagement, partnership and participation with Indigenous Victorians, in accordance with the <i>DEDJTR Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan 2016-18</i>, participate in Native Title Settlement discussions across Government and with Traditional Owner Groups in relation to operational fishery management issues, and continue to work with the Aboriginal community and fishing stakeholders to pursue the outcomes of the <i>Victorian Aboriginal Fishing Strategy</i>. • Continue to work with relevant stakeholders to implement the <i>Victorian Aquaculture Strategy</i>. • Enhance relationships with other stakeholders with an interest in fisheries management, including community groups, environment groups and other relevant stakeholders. • The VFA's website should provide accurate, timely and transparent information to encourage responsible fishing practices and to engage stakeholders to participate in fishery management processes and decisions. • Build on contemporary communications approaches, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter, to engage with Victorian fishers and stakeholders in ways that recognise social, generational, cultural and linguistic diversity. • Develop and implement approaches specifically targeted at stakeholders with lower engagement in fisheries management, including women, to encourage their participation and grow the recreational fishing community.

- Participate in the many community events and festivals that are held across the State each year, with a continued focus on growing participation in sustainable recreational fishing activities and encouraging responsible fishing practices.

VFA Improvement Response

- Establish partnerships with educational institutions to provide training opportunities for Traditional Owners to improve their capacity and capability to contribute to fisheries management on country.
- Increase the use of targeted engagement of priority stakeholder groups such as women fishers on the Facebook platform.
- Investigate the use of the WeChat social networking platform to increase the VFA's engagement with Chinese language speakers.
- Plan and deliver new events in conjunction with stakeholders including local government, Regional Development Victoria, Seafood Industry Victoria and VRFish.

The evaluation concluded that the VFA is exceptionally strong in its stakeholder consultation and engagement, both through formal processes and through public engagement such as events, conferences, and festivals.

The VFA has continued to actively engage with commercial and recreational fishers, aquaculture licence holders and Traditional Owner groups who have a direct interest in decisions that affect their fishing entitlements. The VFA has established formal representative groups from the recreational and commercial fishing sectors, such as the State-wide Recreational Fishing Roundtable and the Aquatic Strategic Action Group, to lead collaborative decision making and management of Victoria's fisheries resources. The implementation of all fisheries management plan, recovery plans and strategies – including the Aquaculture Strategy – is done in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The VFA recognises the strong connection to country and understands that it is the pathway to achieving sustainable increases in the capacity and performance of Indigenous fisheries, collectively and for individual communities. To pursue engagement and increase opportunities for Indigenous Victorians, the VFA has:

- Commenced the development of the VFA Aboriginal Engagement Strategy
- Commenced the revision and redevelopment of the VFA's Aboriginal Fishing Strategy;
- Committed to supporting Indigenous employment in Shepparton, with the new native fish hatchery to employ Indigenous people for up to half of the workforce; and
- Designed and developed projects including the Wallpolla Stocking Trials - 'Culture Based Fisheries'; and Traditional Owner Aquaculture Trials - 'Gunditjmara'.

In 2018, under the *Target One Million* initiative, the VFA established the *Women in Recreational Fishing Network*. The network was developed with three key objectives to: 1) encourage active participation, 2) create strong and collaborative relationships, and 3) support a sustainable and inclusive culture. It has continued to gain momentum growing its membership from 1,200 in 2018-19 to 2,100 in 2019-20.

Social media at the VFA has continued to go from strength to strength and is a major avenue used to communicate and engage with stakeholders. The VFA has continued to steadily gain followers on each of its social media platforms, reaching 65,500 on Facebook, 17,000 on Instagram and 900 on Twitter at 30 June 2020, with a total number of 1,688 posts between the three platforms. In October and December 2019, two simple iPhone videos showing VFA staff at the Snobs Creek Hatchery checking a Murray cod nesting box went 'viral' on Facebook, reaching over 50 million and 7 million viewers, respectively. The VFA's stories on Instagram and Facebook achieve an average of 2,000 views each. Aquaculture and commercial fishing posts have also shown to be popular with the Victorian public; the best of these reaching close to 100,000 people. The VFA has been using WeChat since 2019 and data indicates that the reach is steadily increasing.

The VFA has a high level of participation in community events and festivals every year to promote recreational fishing, commercial fishing industries and aquaculture. Annual events held by the VFA are numerous, and the list below is not exhaustive:

- Vic Fish Kids (approximately six events per year)
- Trout and Murray cod conferences
- Snobs Creek Fish Hatchery Open Day
- Fishing Festivals in Goulburn and Ballarat
- Hooked-on events in Portland, Lakes Entrance and the Bellarine
- Fishing For All events/All-abilities fishing clinics
- Stocking events (approximately 10 a year)
- School Holiday Program at the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre

In addition, the VFA participates in many events throughout the year, including:

- In support of the commercial sector: the Portarlington Mussel Festival, the Apollo Bay Seafood Festival, the San Remo Fishing Festival and the Wild Harvest Seafood Festival in Mallacoota.
- In support of the recreational sector: multicultural community fishing days, Go Fish Nagambie and boat and 4x4 shows.

7. Accountability and transparency

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make publicly available standard processes for fishery management decisions, including how stakeholders can provide input into decisions. • Improved transparency and timeliness in publicly reporting on fishery performance, interactions with protected species and fish stocking, including periodic updates on the stock status of key Victorian fish stocks. • Provide quarterly reports on the implementation of Budget Paper No. 3 performance measure targets. • Commence a review of its cost recovery system within six months to ensure the model is still relevant, efficient and providing appropriate outcomes for both Government and the commercial fishing sector. • Demonstrate effective internal accountability mechanisms are in place for the VFA, and for fisheries representative bodies through funding agreements that include effective and transparent governance and performance measures. • Contribute to delivering the <i>Victorian Gender Equality Strategy</i>, including a commitment to ensure a 50/50 gender balance in all committees and working groups and a commitment to consider the <i>Gender Equality Strategy</i> in the recruitment of VFA staff and the appointment of VFA staff to senior positions. • VFA Board to establish and document appropriate processes to deliver its governance requirements under the VFA Act and to deliver reports in a manner required under the VFA Act and other legislation in a manner consistent with any relevant guidelines including those developed by DEDJTR and agreed by the VFA.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make publicly available standard processes for fishery management decisions, including how stakeholders can provide input to the process. • Report on stock status of key Victorian stocks. • Review fisheries cost recovery system.

- Implement recommendations from KPMG review.

With the evolution of the VFA as a statutory authority over the past two years, the methodology for accountability and transparency has increased markedly. Consultative processes are described in legislation and are adhered to by the VFA, including placing all consultative material on the VFA’s website. The consultative process includes providing stakeholders the opportunity to provide written feedback for consideration by the VFA.

The VFA undertakes annual assessment of Victoria’s key quota species; abalone, rock lobster and giant crab, and reports publicly on stock abundance and quota setting decisions. The analysis of these stocks is a performance measure reported on as part of the *Budget Paper No. 3* (BP3) requirements, with outcomes included in the VFA annual report. As required under the *Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016*, the VFA reports progress against all BP3 to the Secretary of the Department of Transport (then DEDJTR) on a quarterly basis. Further, the VFA participates in the national assessment of key fish stocks, coordinated by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation on a biennial basis, and makes the resulting assessments available on the VFA website.

In December 2018, the VFA engaged Marsden Jacob Associates to undertake a review of the prospective cost recovery system. The terms of reference for the review were to focus on the effectiveness of cost recovery arrangements for Victorian fisheries and opportunities to improve arrangements going forward. The report was delivered in mid-2019 and the VFA is currently determining how to shape a new cost recovery system.

The VFA is committed to supporting objectives of the *Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*. In 2019, the VFA was accepted into the Gender Impact Analysis Pilot Program, coordinated by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The program provided the opportunity for the VFA to have input into the implementation of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, which came into effect on 25 February 2020.

The VFA Board is a gender balanced Board with a Charter that is regularly reviewed. The Board has established three committees: Audit and Risk, People and Safety and Strategy and Engagement Advisory all with their own charters. A governance framework was established, which is reviewed annually and maturity against the framework is assessed. Key mechanisms linked to the framework include strategic risk management, stakeholder engagement and policies and procedures.

8. Clear and consistent regulatory activities

Ministerial Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review and refine approaches to deliver efficient and effective risk-based regulatory outcomes. In particular, the VFA should apply the minimum level of regulatory intervention to achieve the outcome sought. • Design and roll-out an annual education and enforcement strategic plan.
VFA Improvement Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an education and enforcement plan. • Meet with the Red Tape Commissioner to discuss SOE progress and identify improvement opportunities.

An aim of reviewing the *Fisheries Regulations 2009* was to identify opportunities to refine the VFA’s delivery of efficient and effective regulation and to set criteria for regulatory intervention. Risk assessments are conducted annually to determine the focus for enforcement activity; the results of which are captured in the strategic planning of the VFA’s Education and Enforcement branch. To underpin the

annual education and enforcement plan and ensure a cohesive approach, the VFA has developed a high-level multi-year education and enforcement strategic plan.

As required under the SOE, the VFA Chief Executive Officer has had regular meetings with the Red Tape Commissioner to discuss the VFA's implementation of the SOE.

Reporting and evaluation

As required in the SOE, the VFA has incorporated the SOE improvement targets in the annual business plans and reported progress against the performance improvement expectations in its annual report.

Conclusion

The VFA was created in mid-2017 by establishing the then Fisheries Victoria as a statutory authority, consequently much of the SOE was focussed on the VFA growing its role as a stand-alone authority able to meet the expectations of government and the community. The foundation Fisheries Victoria had in place enabled the efficient transition to an effective statutory authority and the SOE guided the VFA's response to an enhanced regulatory environment.

The VFA has achieved each of the improvement targets in the SOE. The findings of the Process Evaluation indicate that the developmental process of the SOE was satisfactory for the VFA. The findings of the Performance Evaluation confirm that the VFA addressed the improvement targets and met the expectations set out by the Minister.

With the achievements outlined above, the VFA is well placed to continue to build an authority that strives for continuous improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of its administration and enforcement activities. The SOE together with the VFA's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024 has built a foundation with a clear focus on being an efficient and effective authority providing healthy, sustainable fisheries for all Victorians



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