



---

# Commercial Fishing Guide

## Western Port and Port Philip Bay

**Edition 1**

**2023**



# DISCLAIMER

This publication may be of assistance to you, but the Victorian Fisheries Authority, State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequences which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

**This publication is a guide only**, it does not replace the *Fisheries Act 1995*, the *Fisheries Regulations 2019* or other Acts and subordinate legislation applying to or affecting commercial fishing.

Copies of the Act and Regulations can be downloaded from [www.legislation.vic.gov.au](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)

This guide summarises the law at the time of publication and cannot be used as a defence in court.

**Fishing laws change from time to time. It is your responsibility to ensure you are acting within the law.**

It is the responsibility of fishers to be aware of any changes that are made to fisheries rules and regulations. You can do this by:

- routinely checking the Fisheries Notices on Victorian Fisheries Authority website ([www.vfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.vfa.vic.gov.au)) ([www.vfa.vic.gov.au/operational-policy/legislation-and-regulation/fisheries-notices](http://www.vfa.vic.gov.au/operational-policy/legislation-and-regulation/fisheries-notices))
- discuss any queries with your local compliance officers.

---

# Contents

<b>DISCLAIMER</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>WESTERN PORT AND PORT PHILLIP BAY FISHERY SUPPLEMENT</b>	<b>1</b>
About this guide	1
About the Western Port/Port Phillip Bay fishery	1
<b>AREAS OF OPERATION</b>	<b>2</b>
Areas where fishing cannot take place in Port Phillip Bay	2
Time of operation	4
Port Phillip Bay	4
Western Port	4
<b>COMMERCIAL FISHING BOATS</b>	<b>5</b>
Commercial vessel registration clearly marked	5
Vessel Monitoring System	6
<b>RECREATIONAL FISHING BY COMMERCIAL FISHERS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>COMMERCIAL FISHING EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>8</b>
1.Fishing lines including a longlines	9
Fishing Line	9
Longlines	9
2.Bay fish trap	10
3.Commercial hoop net	10
4.Dip net	11
5.Octopus pot	11
6.Bait pump	11
7.Underwater breathing apparatus	11
8.Mussel rake	12
9.By Hand (to take mussels)	12
<b>PROHIBITED EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>12</b>
1.Nets of all types	12
2.Rock lobster pots	13
3.Scallop dredges	13
<b>SPECIES CAUGHT COMMERCIALY</b>	<b>15</b>
Size limits for commercially caught species	16
<b>RESTRICTED SPECIES</b>	<b>17</b>

---

<b>REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS OF FISHERS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Landing and weighing of catch</b>	<b>18</b>
Weighing catch	18
Daily catch reporting	18
eQuota reporting	18
<b>Catch Disposal Records</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Fish receipts</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>WHAT HAPPENS IF REGULATIONS ARE BREACHED?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>EMERGENCY CONTACTS</b>	<b>21</b>
Key Staff Contacts	21

---

# WESTERN PORT AND PORT PHILLIP BAY FISHERY SUPPLEMENT

## About this guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide information and guidance relating to the Western Port/Port Phillip Bay commercial fishery. Whether you are a licenced commercial fisher, recreational fisher or a member of the general public, the guide will assist with an overview to understand the activities, requirements and processes undertaken by commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay.

## About the Western Port/Port Phillip Bay fishery

The Western Port/Port Phillip Bay commercial fishery, like many other Victorian fisheries, has operated for several generations. In recent years, the fishery has reduced in size and function because of several State Government initiatives.

Most recently, a compulsory buyback was commenced in 2015 which aimed at removing net fishing of all kinds. This Government funded initiative resulted in the cessation of net fishing from 1 April 2022 and the reduction of commercial fishing licences to a total of 8.

These 8 remaining licences continue to provide an important source of fresh local seafood to the community using targeted methods.

The focus of the fishery is one of sustainability and targeted fishing, with regulated limits on certain species, equipment and effort.

Harmonious sharing of our fisheries resources remains a key focus, with this guide providing an understanding of the fishery, regulatory requirements and processes undertaken for the benefit of commercial fishers and the general public.

---

## AREAS OF OPERATION

Commercial fishing licence holders, or an operator authorised to conduct the fishing activity on their behalf<sup>1</sup>, can work throughout Western Port and Port Phillip Bay, with the exception of some restricted areas limited for various reasons, including marine safety requirements.

For the purpose of the above areas of commercial fishing operations, the following definitions are listed in the Fisheries Regulation 2019:

- **Port Phillip Bay** means all the waters within the bays lying north of a line from the most seaward point of Point Lonsdale to the most seaward point of Point Nepean and includes the waters of Hobson's Bay and Corio Bay, *but not the waters of Swan Bay*.
- **Swan Bay** includes all the waters of that bay lying westward of a line from Black Billy Point to Point Norgate westward from the mouth of the Queenscliff Creek.
- **Western Port** means all of the waters of the bay known as Western Port which lie north of a line bearing 53° East from Cape Woolamai to the opposite shore and a line running directly from West Head at Flinders to the southernmost point of Point Grant on Phillip Island.

## Areas where fishing cannot take place in Port Phillip Bay

Key areas where **commercial fishing cannot take place** in Port Phillip Bay include:

- Any marine national park or sanctuary
- Any shipping channel defined by channel markers
- Within a distance of 400 metres from any part of the St Kilda Pier<sup>^</sup>
- Within a distance of 230 metres from any part of the Kerford Road Jetty, Hobson's Bay

**NOTE: Commercial hoop nets or mussel rakes may be used in these areas, but not other commercial fishing equipment**

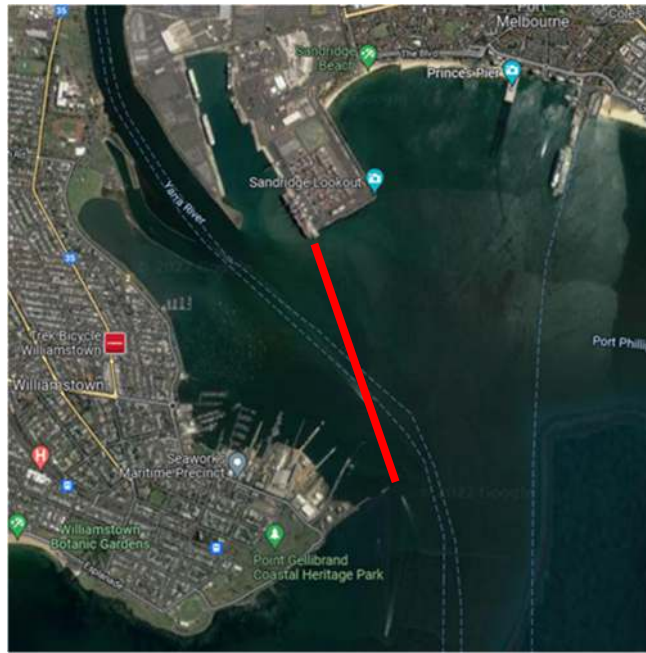
- Within a distance of 30 metres from any part of any other pier, jetty or wharf

**NOTE: Commercial hoop nets or mussel rakes may be used in these areas, but not other commercial fishing equipment**

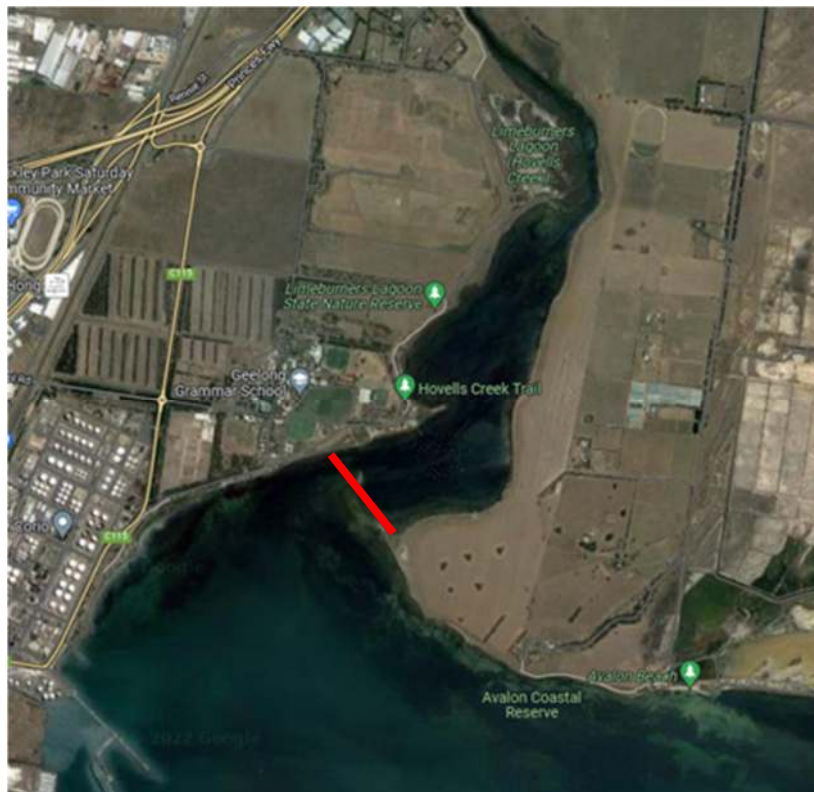
- North or west of a line running from Williamstown Breakwater Pier to the end of Webb Dock.

---

<sup>1</sup> Only an authorised single operator at any one time is permitted to conduct fishing activity on behalf of a licence holder, if the licence holder themselves is not conducting the fishing activity. The operator may have one or more crew working with them.

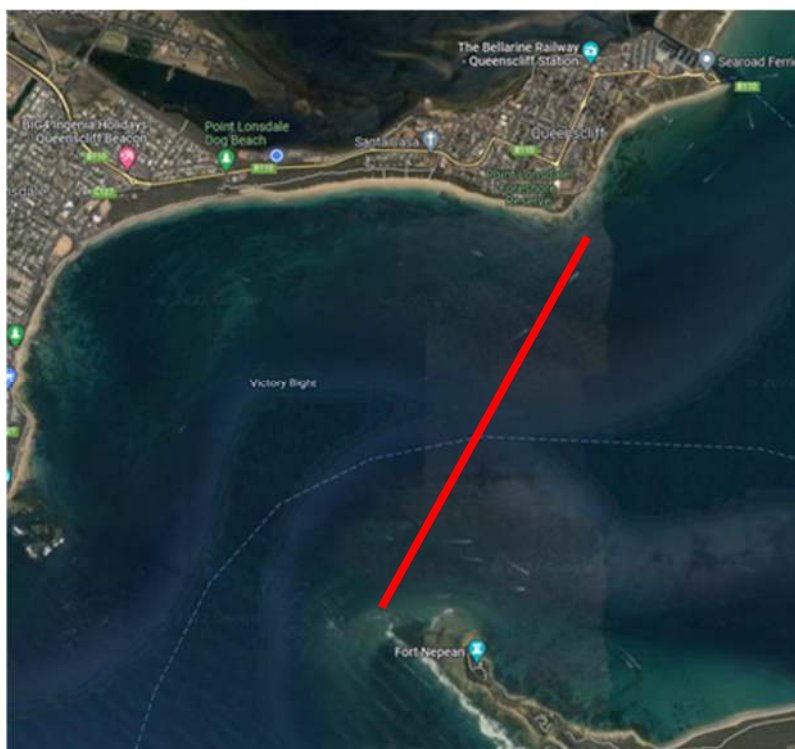


- Limeburners Bay (*Grammar School Lagoon*) north or east of its entry, being a line between Point Abeona and the northern shore.



- 
- Waters west of a line between the end of Queenscliff Pier and Point Nepean.

***\*NOTE: Fishing lines may be used in this area, but not any other commercial fishing equipment***



## Time of operation

### Port Phillip Bay

In Port Phillip Bay, commercial fishing is not restricted to any particular time of the day.

### Western Port

In Western Port, only fishing lines with a maximum of 3 hooks or a single bait jig can be used or possessed between 12:00pm on any Saturday through to 10:00pm on the following Sunday.

Outside of these times, all other permitted commercial fishing equipment may be used.



---

## COMMERCIAL FISHING BOATS

### Commercial vessel registration clearly marked

When undertaking commercial fishing activity in Western Port or Port Phillip Bay, commercial fishers operate from a commercially registered fishing vessel.

This means that the vessel is registered with the VFA and an identifying mark is displayed on the vessel containing 3 characters. This identifying mark must be clearly visible on both sides of the bow, above the water line and at least 20 centimetres high. This identifying number helps recognise and differentiate a commercial fishing vessel from other commercial or recreational boats.

Recreational boats in Victoria display 5 characters, generally with 2 letters and 3 numbers. Commercial fishing activity cannot be undertaken from a boat that only has recreational registration.

As the size and shape of commercial fishing vessels varies significantly, it is important that identifying marks are clearly depicted.

This assists with both regulation and public awareness as commercial fishing boats can be encountered being launched at boat ramps or moored in larger port facilities.



*Recreational Fishing vessel – showing registration mark (MS123)*



*Commercial fishing vessel – showing registration mark (Y2Y)*

## Vessel Monitoring System

In addition to clear identifying marks, commercial fishing vessels are required to have an approved Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) fitted and operational during all commercial fishing activity.

The VMS allows the vessel to

- be monitored for compliance purposes,
- ensure operation in the appropriate area/fishery and
- enable more efficient and effective regulation by Fisheries Officers.

## RECREATIONAL FISHING BY COMMERCIAL FISHERS

*Can commercial fishers go fishing recreationally in Western Port, Port Phillip Bay or other Victorian waters?*

They most certainly can, however there are some regulatory requirements that must be adhered to so the VFA can clearly distinguish between recreational and commercial activities.

If a commercial fisher wishes to go fishing recreationally, the following must be complied with:

1. The recreational and commercial fishing cannot be undertaken on the same trip
2. The fisher must hold a recreational fishing licence or valid exemption
3. If using a commercially registered fishing vessel, prior to the trip commencing:
  - Must notify the VFA via the **Operations Duty Officer** (0419 844 781).
  - All commercial fishing equipment must be removed from the vessel

- 
- Must make an entry in the vessel logbook<sup>2</sup> with date, time, launching place, words “Recreational Trip” and return details.
4. Recreational daily catch limits and size limits must be adhered to. Commercially restricted species are available to be caught recreationally
  5. No catch taken recreationally is to be sold
  6. All equipment used must comply with recreational equipment definitions and specifications.

---

<sup>2</sup> A vessel logbook is required by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority for all vessels in commercial survey.

---

## COMMERCIAL FISHING EQUIPMENT

The equipment used by commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay has changed significantly in recent years. This is due to the removal of net fishing. All equipment used by commercial fishers in the bays must be marked accordingly with a surface float depicting the licence number, which will start with the letters “PW”.

In addition, longlines require an orange flag of at least 30 centimetres in size. This ensures other vessels are alerted to the fishing activity in the area. As the majority of longline fishing occurs in deeper water, the actively fishing section of the line is unlikely to create any hazard to other boat operators.



*Marked float for commercial equipment*

These measures are not required for equipment in the immediate possession of commercial fishers, such as fishing rods/lines, handlines or bait pumps for example.

---

The Regulations permit the following types of commercial fishing equipment in Western Port/Port Phillip Bay<sup>3</sup>:

## 1. Fishing lines including a longlines

### Fishing Line

Fishing lines are the main piece of equipment used by commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay.

Hook and line fishing is considered a targeted form of fishing and generally encounters few issues with bycatch or interactions with unwanted species of fish or wildlife.

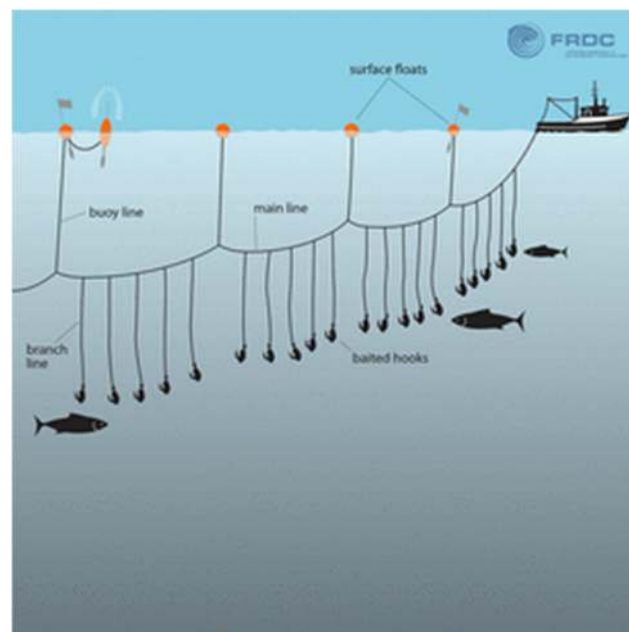
Fishing lines can take the form of rods with lines or handlines. In these instances a **maximum of 3 hooks or a single bait jig for each line is permitted** to be used or possessed by the commercial fisher.

No more than:

- **9 lines** can be used in **Western Port**
- **6 lines** can be used in **Port Phillip Bay**.

### Longlines

Longline fishing is widely used by commercial fishers, particularly when targeting species like snapper.



**Diagram of a longline**

---

<sup>3</sup> Regulation 43 allows the VFA to permit other equipment for a particular commercial fishing licence, if deemed acceptable, in rare circumstances.

---

These longlines consist of a baseline that is weighted to the bottom at each end, with multiple snoods or leaders extending from this baseline. These snoods or leaders lead to a baited hook.

- **In Western Port a single longline** can be used or possessed by commercial fishers **with no more than 1000 hooks attached**.
- **In Port Phillip Bay**, commercial fishers can utilise **2 longlines**, but must **not use or possess more than a combined total of 400 hooks**.

Longlines are left in the water whilst they are active and the *Regulations* dictate that they are marked on the surface as described above.

## 2. Bay fish trap

Bay fish traps are the only enclosed form of trap permitted for use by commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay.

Whilst examples vary, a bay fish trap must not exceed 2 metres in length, 1 metre height and 1.5 metres width. A bay fish trap must also have only one single entrance.

In Port Phillip Bay commercial fishers cannot use or possess more than 6 bay fish traps.



*Image of a Bay fish trap*

## 3. Commercial hoop net

Commercial hoop nets are essentially the same design as recreational hoop nets but are not restricted in size. They consist of no more than two hoops and are open at the top.

In Port Phillip Bay commercial fishers cannot use or possess more than 50 of these nets. In addition, nets exceeding 3 metres in diameter cannot be used from any pier, jetty or wharf.

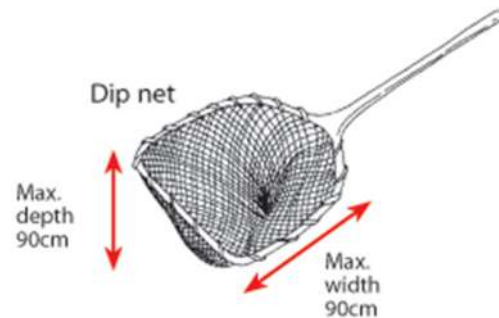
---

**Commercial hoop nets are not permitted in Western Port.**



#### **4. Dip net**

A dip net can be used as part of the commercial fishing operation and serves several purposes. It must be, no more than 90 centimetres wide or deep and be attached to a handle.



#### **5. Octopus pot**

Octopus pots are generally used in strings or fleets by commercial fishers targeting octopus. They are essentially an unbaited, open container. Fleets of octopus traps will be marked accordingly, as described previously.

#### **6. Bait pump**

Bait pumps are a recognisable piece of recreational and commercial fishing equipment. These are standard specifications and used to take bait species. The barrel of any bait pump must not exceed 8.5 centimetres in diameter.



#### **7. Underwater breathing apparatus**

Whilst permitted by the regulations for commercial fishers, underwater breathing apparatus is rarely used in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay. It does however constitute one of the few methods permitted for the taking of mussels by commercial fishers in Port Phillip Bay.

---

## 8. Mussel rake

A mussel rake can be used by commercial fishers to take mussels from man-made structures only. It is defined as a hand operated rake, with a head not exceeding 50 centimetres in width, with a single row of teeth up to 10 centimetres in length. Mussel rakes can be used only in Port Phillip Bay. **Mussel rakes are not permitted in Western Port.**

## 9. By Hand (to take mussels)

Hand collection of mussels is permitted in Port Phillip Bay only.

**NOTE: Only Licence holders are permitted to take mussels** irrespective of the method used. Crew members are **not permitted** to take mussels.

## PROHIBITED EQUIPMENT

There are many types of commercial fishing equipment that may be permitted in other parts of Victoria, or indeed Australia, that are not allowed in Western Port or Port Phillip Bay.

The following highlights some forms of fishing that must not be used in the in Western Port or Port Phillip Bay commercial fishery.

If this equipment is observed being used, it should be reported to the 13FISH (13 3474) 24-hour offence reporting hotline.

### 1. Nets of all types

**All forms of net fishing in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay were ceased on 1 April 2022.** This includes mesh netting, beach seine and purse seine netting practices.

**Larger forms of net fishing, such as various types of trawl operations are not permitted in these bays.**

Trawl operations come in different shapes and sizes, but generally involve a large, heavy-duty net be towed through the water. These practices do exist in other waters and jurisdictions and generally involve large commercial fishing vessels. It is common to see such vessels in Western Port or Port Phillip Bay, but only when heading to or from port. These vessels will have authorisation to possess these types of equipment onboard, but it will not be used in Western Port or Port Phillip Bay.





*Example of a commercial trawling vessel*

## 2. Rock lobster pots

Along Victoria's coastline a commercial rock lobster fishery operates.

Vessels with rock lobster pots on board may be seen in ports such as Queenscliff as their area of operation is the coastline outside Port Phillip Heads.

**Rock lobster pots are not permitted to be used inside Western Port or Port Phillip Bay.**



## 3. Scallop dredges

**The practice of towing dredges, such as commercial scallop dredging, which occurred in Port Phillip Bay until 1995, is not permitted in either of the bays.**

As with various other fishing vessels from other jurisdictions, it is commonplace to see large commercial vessels in port with scallop dredges fitted from time to time. These vessels will not be operating in the bays and will generally be in port between fishing trips in other Commonwealth or State waters.



---

## SPECIES CAUGHT COMMERCIALY

The Western Port/Port Phillip Bay fishery is principally based around snapper (*Chrysophrys auratus*), targeted largely using longline methods. Other prominent species retained include gummy shark (*Mustelus antarcticus*), flathead species (*Platycephalidae* family) and rays.

Each licence is permitted an annual catch allocation of certain species. These catch limits/quotas cannot be exceeded. The annual catch limits/quotas are as follows:

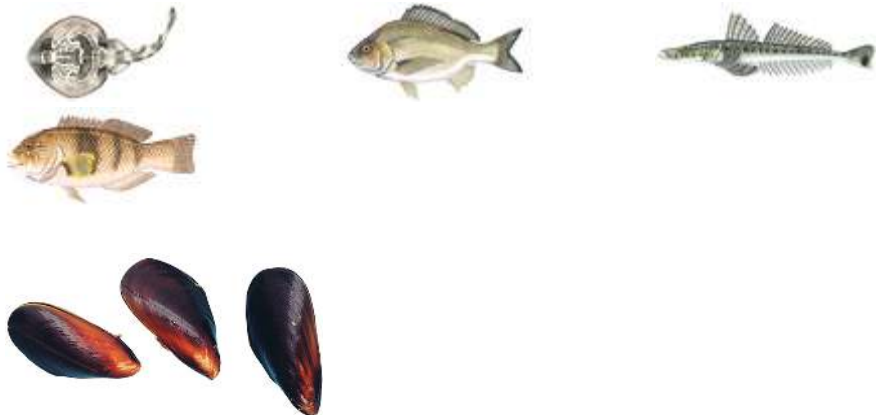
- **Snapper** 11,000kg



- **Gummy/School shark** 1,000kg



- **All other fish species** 2,000kg



Blue mussels (taken from PPB only and ONLY by the Licence Operator using underwater breathing apparatus by hand and/ or using a mussel rake)



Octopus

**Caution** Blue ring octopus can bite and inject a powerful and potential deadly toxin.

---

**NOTE:**

- **Wrasse** species can be taken and fall within the limit for other fish species.
  - In addition, wrasse have a **daily catch/possession limit for commercial fishers of 8 fish.**
- **Mussels** can also be taken commercially and fall within the limit of 2,000kg for other fish species
  - **Mussels cannot be sold for human consumption.**
    - If mussels are to be sold as bait, they must be contained and labelled “NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION” within 1 hour of landing.
    - The labelling must also include the licence holder’s name or business name.

**NOTE:**

- The majority of mussels harvested and provided for human consumption in Port Phillip Bay are grown in aquaculture reserves by aquaculture licensees.
- For more information please visit <https://vfa.vic.gov.au/aquaculture>.

### **Size limits for commercially caught species**

Fisheries regulations specify that commercial fishers must not have on board or land any species of fish that is smaller or larger than the minimum and maximum legal sizes specified in Schedule 25 and Schedule 24.

The size limits for fish set out in Schedule 25 are specific to commercial access licence holders. If the fish species is not listed in this Schedule, then the minimum and maximum size limits set out in Schedule 24 apply.

Minimum size limits for some of the fish commonly caught are:

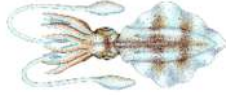
- Snapper 28 cm
- Bluethroat wrasse 30 cm
- Australian salmon 21 cm
- Sand Mullet 22 cm
- Yellow-eye mullet 24 cm
- Longfin pike and snook 36 cm
- Tailor 25 cm
- Flathead (all species) 27 cm
- Flounder (all species) 23 cm
- Bream (all species) 28 cm
- Gummy shark 45 cm
- School shark 45 cm.

---

## RESTRICTED SPECIES

Commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay cannot commercially fish for the following species:

- **Southern calamari**



- **Yellowtail kingfish**



- **King George whiting**



- **Mulloway**



The catch limits and species restrictions are currently regulated by a Fisheries Notice, which is declared and published annually. Fisheries Notices for various purposes can be viewed on the VFA website:

<https://vfa.vic.gov.au/operational-policy/legislation-and-regulation/fisheries-notices>

Also, by regulation commercial fishers in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay cannot commercially fish for the following species:

- Abalone
- Giant Crab
- Jellyfish
- Pipi
- Rock lobster
- Scallop and
- Sea urchin.

---

## REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS OF FISHERS

In addition to equipment, vessel and species regulations, commercial fishers are also required to fulfil some other obligations to ensure the fishery is managed in a sustainable way. The following outlines the typical activities conducted by commercial fishers from catching fish to transport to market.

### Landing and weighing of catch

Once fishing is completed, commercial fishers will return in their vessels to a port. This will include berthing facilities in common ports for larger vessels or boat ramp facilities for trailer boats. On arrival, fishers will complete critical processes before they can leave the place of landing. Places where commercial fishers must land are stipulated in the *Regulations* and include most port areas, harbours and boat ramps.

#### Weighing catch

The most pressing requirement upon landing of the fish is to ensure the catch is accurately weighed within 60 minutes. The *Regulations* ensure that catch weights are required to be accurate to within 1 kilogram, if inspected by Fisheries Officers, demonstrating the importance of quota integrity to the fishery. The weighing of all fish must be done whilst they are whole, as catch limits/quotas relate to the whole fish being removed from the environment. The exceptions to this rule relate to shark species and rays.

Sharks may be weighed in trunk form, which means the head and gut can be removed at sea prior to landing. Ray species may have the wings or flaps removed to be retained. When undertaking this processing at sea, commercial fishers must ensure that fish are euthanized humanely prior to processing.

#### Daily catch reporting

Once weighing is complete, all information can be entered into the fishers Catch & Effort Record book. The book details all relevant catch information, including equipment used, fishing time, location, species, weights of those species caught for quota management purposes and more. This critical information underpins the management of the fishery.

The Catch and Effort record book is carried on board the vessel whenever any fishing activity is being conducted.

Detailed instruction pages are provided in the Catch & Effort Record book to ensure that it is completed accurately and at the correct time.

#### eQuota reporting

Once completed, fishers then use a smart phone application (app), known as *eQuota*, to provide basic catch and weight information to the VFA in real-time. The *eQuota* app provides the fisher with a confirmation number, which can then be entered into the Catch & Effort Record book, completing all landing requirements. The information provided to the *eQuota* system enables the VFA to access real-time fishery data, further ensuring the integrity of the fishery.

---

On completion of these requirements, the fisher is permitted to leave the place of landing with the fish and Catch & Effort Record book in their (the fisher's) possession.

If the fisher wishes to use a third party to transport their catch, then the Catch Disposal Record must be completed before the catch leaves the fisher's possession (see Section below)

## Catch Disposal Records

When the time comes to sell or dispose of their fish, commercial fishers are obliged to create a document that accompanies those fish.

At the first point of sale, or disposal, fishers are provided with a *Catch Disposal Record* book in order to complete a *Catch Disposal Record* (CDR) for any fish they consign. This assists with transparency of commercially harvested fish from capture to consumer.

This process can occur at any time or place once all landing requirements have been completed by the fisher. As an example, a fisher may choose to sell some or all of their catch at the point of landing, once landing requirements have been completed. In this instance, they will complete a CDR and provide it to the buyer to accompany the fish.

## Fish receipts

There may be instances where commercial fishers intend to sell their fish in multiple, smaller consignments. In these instances, instead of issuing multiple *CDRs*, fishers may choose to use *fish receipts* to accompany their sales. In these examples, commercial fishers will have already completed their obligation to create a *CDR* for all of their catch, generally issuing it to themselves prior to any sales. Having a variety of ways to provide documents for the sale of fish creates flexibility whilst still ensuring transparency from capture to consumer.

The key message in relation to consumers purchasing fish directly from licenced commercial fishermen is that a document must be issued with the fish by law, whether it be a *CDR* or *fish receipt*. For the details required to be completed on a fish receipt, please refer to the Commercial Fishing Guide, published by the VFA.

---

## WHAT HAPPENS IF REGULATIONS ARE BREACHED?

Commercial fishers are provided an authority to undertake activities that the general public are not permitted to carry out. This relates to the use of certain equipment, higher catch limits to be retained and the sale of their fish. As a result, this authority carries a high level of responsibility and expectation.

To ensure commercial fishers are given the best opportunity to succeed, prospective licence holders or operators must undergo rigorous scrutiny to deem their suitability to operate within the fishery. This process involves an interview with a Fisheries Officer covering examination on relevant regulations, criminal history checks, knowledge of the fishery and ability to comply with legislation.

Breaches of the *Act*, *Regulations* or a *Fisheries Notice* as they relate to commercial fishing carry far higher penalties than general recreational fishing offences, due to the added responsibility and authority afforded to commercial fishers. Offences against commercial fishing licence conditions such as using illegal equipment, failing to adhere to reporting/landing requirements, failing to provide truthful and accurate catch information or exceeding catch limits can carry penalties nearing \$18,500 or 6 months imprisonment.



---

## EMERGENCY CONTACTS

<b>Victorian Fisheries Authority</b>	
Operations Duty Officer	0419 844 781
Commercial Fishers Duty Officer	0418 519 215
13FISH Offence Report Line	13 34 74
<b>Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action</b>	
Whale and Dolphin Emergency Hotline	1300 136 017
<b>Lifesaving Victoria</b>	
LSV Communications (for info on shark sightings, beach closures etc.)	13 SURF (13 7873)
<b>Victoria Police</b>	
Rescue Coordination Centre / Water Police	(03) 9399 7500

### Key Staff Contacts

#### Paul Shea

Fisheries Operations Manager  
Paul.shea@vfa.vic.gov.au

#### Toby Jeavons

Fisheries Manager, Marine and Estuarine Fisheries  
[Toby.jeavons@vfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:Toby.jeavons@vfa.vic.gov.au)

#### Commercial Licensing Enquiries

Commercial Fisheries Licensing  
Commercial.licensing@vfa.vic.gov.au  
03 9392 6860

