



## Rye Community Group Alliance

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Joining as one voice to benefit the Rye Community

### COMMENT ON DRAFT FISHERIES (SPIDER CRAB) NOTICE 2020

The Rye Community Group Alliance (RCGA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make comment on the proposed VFA reduction in the harvesting of spider crabs. We have also taken the opportunity to highlight the avoidance of VFA in dealing with a situation that has caused so much community outrage.

Please note we had written to Travis Dowling about this issue on 20 February 2020 and emailed him On 17 June 2019. I don't believe we received a response.

#### The Community Situation

- 1. Public Opinion on the practice of plundering the spider crabs at moulting time:** there has been substantial media coverage and community outrage. The following link to the Age newspaper encapsulates the opinion of the majority of the local and wider community - *A shameful act of carnage and vandalism*. <https://google.com/newsstand/s/CBlwofqa9Ug>
- 2. Health Hazard:** huge numbers of chicken carcasses used as bait by the crabbers were washing up onto the beach attracting vermin such as rats. Carcasses were also discarded in the car park and on the foreshore.
- 3. Destruction of the fragile pier ecosystem:** the frenzy of the crabbers to catch as many crabs as they could meant the metal cages tore weed and other habitat (eg seahorses) off the Pier pylons. Rays that traditionally feed off the moulting crabs didn't have a chance. The chicken carcasses bought sharks.
- 4. Trashing of the foreshore & Pier:** rubbish including carcasses and nets were left strewn around the pier, the beach and foreshore. Locals and divers had to pick up the rubbish. It was ratepayers that had to pay for the extra rubbish services not the visiting crabbers.
- 5. Illegal Crabbing:** There were many examples not seen/picked-up by VFA of illegal crabbing in the intertidal zone
- 6. What the large number of people who came to Rye missed:** An amazing sight of the aggregating and moulting of spider crabs and event freely available to viewers up until 2019. People were distressed by what they saw over the June long weekend. Many, including children were pushed out of the way by crabbers so they had no chance of seeing what they came to see. It was totally unacceptable behaviour on behalf of the crabbers.
- 7. No Net benefit to the community:** the crabbers are of no economic value to the Rye (or Blairgowrie) communities as once their multiple eskies are filled, they return to Melbourne or the suburbs. However, up until 2019 divers, tourists/day trippers and Peninsula locals would come to watch and then 'hit' the local cafes.

VFA has avoided addressing the sheer volume in numbers of these 'new' crabbers who came to Rye in 2020. In 2019 they came to Blairgowrie in buses! The proposed reduction in harvest rate will address none of the above issues including the volume of crabbers and their accomplices.

#### Response to VFA Rationale

- 1. This new catch limit - halved from 30 to 15 - better balances spider crab values and more equitably shares spider crabs among fishers and other stakeholders.**

What spider crab values is VFA alluding to? Essentially, it does nothing of the sort and VFA has made no attempt to address the real issue or even make mention of the mass taking of the crabs during the moulting season from hard marine surfaces such as Rye Pier and Blairgowrie marina. In fact VFA make no mention that the community concern centres around the plundering of the crabs during the moulting season.

**2. The proposed new, reduced bag limit is more consistent with the recreational catch limits that apply to spider crabs in New South Wales and Tasmania.**

Is VFA being disingenuous by making the above statement? Why is VFA using the broad Family name of Majidae rather than the genus and species of the spider crab at the heart of the issue- *Leptomithrax gaimardii* ?

Further, there is virtually no mention of spider crabs - *Leptomithrax gaimardii* in Tasmania and there appears to be no specific mention of the species in NSW. In Tasmania mention is made of the giant crab - *Pseudocarcinus gigas*, a different species to the Victorian Spider crab.

In no State is there mention of 'spider crabs' as a tourist attraction or of them being caught in large numbers from Piers and Marinas. What did VFA investigate?

VFA is deliberately side-stepping addressing the issue of mass plundering at Piers and marinas. No one has complained about people catching the crabs out in the Bay.

**3. Recreational fishing for spider crabs has developed in recent years. Recent research undertaken by the VFA indicates spider crab fishing is valued by parts of Victoria's multicultural community as an enjoyable day out, with the vast majority using the crabs they catch to cook and eat.**

The above statement is misleading both for the Minister and members of the public. As mentioned previously the issue concerns the mass plundering of the spider crabs during the moulting season at Rye Pier and Blairgowrie Marina.

We seriously question the research findings that *spider crab fishing is valued by parts of Victoria's multicultural community as an enjoyable day out*. In March 2020, on ABC radio (afternoon show, 18/6/2020) Mr D'Silva, the Director, VFA claimed the catching of GSC is culturally important to sections of the Chinese and Japanese community but he provided no details as to why it was important. Now VFA is saying it's an enjoyable day out for Victoria's multicultural community! Really? VFA needs to be clear on just what it is claiming and make available its 'research'.

VFA has consistently ignored the fact that until 2019 the crab aggregation was and enjoyable experience for very large numbers of people from a range of cultural backgrounds who came to Rye and Blairgowrie to simply watch this amazing phenomenon!

Is the VFA saying the wants of a small Melbourne group who had no interest in the spider crabs until 2019 must be catered to and the the large majority of multicultural groups who want to see the plundering stopped, ignored? VFA is doing its best to incite racism.

**Conclusion:**

The mass plundering of GSC only started in 2019 (at Blairgowrie Marina) and it surely can't be a coincidence that the crabs did not return there in 2020. We believe this plundering issue is not, as VFA maintains, about letting an 'ethnic' group simply enjoy themselves on a day out but of the ethics surrounding the very easy plucking/netting of the crabs during their vulnerable moulting period, the impact on the Pier marine and land environment and of the rights of locals and visitors to passively view this incredible phenomenon.

There is very strong evidence (petitions and media coverage) that the large majority of people who have witnessed the nauseating spectacle of 'new' crabbers plundering moulting crabs at Rye Pier and Blairgowrie marina want the harvesting to stop. VFA has certainly been consistent in deliberately avoiding the call to ban the harvesting using a smokes and mirrors approach to dealing with the issue (see above). Why?

We request that VFA implements a policy of no harvesting of the spider crab – *Leptomithrax gaimardii* at hard marine surfaces such as Rye Pier and the Blairgowrie marina during the moulting season – effective before the 2021 season.

RCGA requests acknowledgement of the receipt of this submission and that the questions we raised above, answered.

Mechelle Cheers  
Chair  
Rye Community Group Alliance

**Cc:**  
Chris Brayne MP for Nepean  
John Baker, CEO Mornington Peninsula Shire Council