



Fish habitat Improvement Fund

Grant Application Guidelines 2025



Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples, and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise the strength of Aboriginal people and communities and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life, through their daily work and at key events, and how this enriches us all. We recognise all Aboriginal cultures and communities are diverse and should be celebrated. We acknowledge that the land and water is of spiritual, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation: guaranteeing equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice. We have distinct legislative obligations to Traditional Landowner groups that are paramount in our responsibilities in managing Victoria's resources.

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Message from the Minister

More than one million Victorians go fishing every year and many, travel far and wide to visit some great fishing spots in our beautiful Victorian bays, estuaries, lakes and rivers. Recreational fishers have a strong affinity for where they fish and know, that fishing is best when our waterways are healthy. Historically, some of our fisheries have been impacted by poor land and water management practices and these fisheries need our help to recover.

The Government supports recreational fishing and is investing \$96 million dollars over the next four years through the **Go Fish Victoria** initiative which aims to get more people fishing, more often. This initiative includes a new \$2.5 million dollar **Fish Habitat Improvement Fund** which will help preserve and improve freshwater, estuarine and marine fish habitat. **The Fish Habitat Improvement Fund** presents an opportunity to encourage and empower recreational fishers to get involved and improve their local fishery. The fund will also build partnerships and co-investment opportunities across agencies to address larger-scale fish habitat priorities across the state.

Recreational fishers are strong stewards and advocates for waterways because they understand, healthy waters and fish habitat means better fishing outcomes. **The Fish Habitat Improvement Fund** is a great opportunity for recreational fishers to work with resource management agencies to protect, recover, repair and improve fish habitat where this work is most needed.

I encourage recreational fishers and government agencies to take up this opportunity to get involved and make a lasting long-lasting difference to support their local fisheries and their fishing passion.

Steve Dimopoulos MP

Minister for Outdoor Recreation

1. What is the Fish Habitat Improvement Fund?

In 2022, the Victorian Government announced a commitment of \$2.5 million dollars to improve fish habitat (**Fish Habitat Improvement Fund**) to preserve and improve freshwater, marine, estuarine, and freshwater fisheries. This is part of the Government's Go Fishing Victoria plan to get more people fishing, more often, in more places.

This initiative will be managed by the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) through the provision of grants to eligible organisations to deliver habitat improvements across the state.

The **Fish Habitat Improvement Fund** supports two streams:

Stream 1. Empowering recreational fishers to improve local fish habitat - Local recreational fisher organisations, waterway stewardship and minor restoration works.

Stream 2. Partnerships to address critical fish habitat priorities - Agency and recreational fisher partnerships to coinvest in priority major works to restore, recover and rebuild fish populations.

There are many opportunities across Victoria for improving fish habitat. Whether it's placing snags, planting trees, keeping livestock out of rivers, removing blackberries or building artificial reefs, this program will create a lasting legacy for future generations of fishers in Victoria, in both the health of our waterways and our fisheries. Here are some examples of project opportunities that could be eligible for funding. However, if you believe that you have a great habitat improvement idea, big or small, then we would love to hear from you.

- Habitat Enhancement for threatened species (eg Macquarie Perch and Trout Cod)
- Re-snagging and other physical habitat enhancement in local waterways
- Upper catchment riparian restoration
- Port Philip Bay shellfish reef restoration
- Estuarine fish habitat enhancement
- Seagrass bed preservation, enhancement and recovery
- Removal of barriers critical to threatened fish migration
- Value adding other large scale fish habitat initiatives.
- Empowering recreational fishers and communities to have a lasting capacity in delivering for our fisheries.



2. Who can apply?

The following government and non-government organisations with strong links to recreational fisher networks are eligible to apply for the Fish Habitat Improvement funding:

- Catchment Management Authorities
- Local, regional, and state-wide angling organisations and associations
- Local Councils
- Water Authorities
- Other NRM agencies
- Traditional owner groups and organisations, land councils, trusts and co-operatives working on-country
- Non-government community organisations
- Crown Land Committees of Management
- Registered Training Organisations, including schools and universities

Financial Governance

In addition to be eligible for funding, applicants must be:

- an incorporated association registered through Consumer Affairs Victoria (check here: www.consumer.vic.gov.au) or other state incorporating agency; or
- a registered not-for-profit organisation with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (check here: ACNC www.acnc.gov.au); or
- a Committee of Management incorporated under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978; or
- a Registered Aboriginal Party under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, or
- an educational institution.

3. Who cannot apply?

The following organisations and individuals cannot apply for funding:

- Commonwealth Government agencies
- Private companies or trusts
- Private individuals



4. What might be funded?

Projects must be undertaken wholly on Crown land or on private land (with the consent of the land holder) within a riparian zone where there is a clear public benefit.

Your project budget must clearly define project costs, including any GST on supply items required to deliver your project.

The following categories of expenditure are eligible for funding:

- Environmental assessments*
- Contractors*
- Works associated with excluding livestock access to waterways
- Advertising to raise volunteer interest and promote the project (including printing, design and postage)
- Rubbish removal
- Site preparation
- Materials (e.g. plants, chemicals, etc)
- Equipment hire or purchase directly related to project's on-ground components**
- On-ground practical demonstration and educational events
- Exclusion fencing
- Personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, goggles and masks)
- Project coordination#
- Signage
- Site security
- Pilot projects
- Costs of permits, Cultural Heritage checks, etc, directly related to the project
- Insurance renewal or organisation membership renewal that includes insurance cover, such as Landcare Victoria Incorporated membership.

* Contractors must be from an external party.

** Capital items must become a registered asset of the entity.

A maximum of 15% of total grant funding can be used for incurred costs for project coordination (e.g. staff wages for time worked on project and project associated administrative costs) and does not need to be itemised.

5. What will not be funded?

The Fish Habitat Improvement Fund will not cover the following activities:

- Projects assessed as not meeting the eligibility and/or assessment criteria will not be funded.
- Works or activities on private land where there is no public benefit (refer section 4),
- Project activities commenced prior to the project activities start date.



6. What are the funding details?

The total funding available is \$2.5 million dollars (less program administration costs) over the period of July 2023 to June 2026. A maximum of 50% of the grant funding will be made available in the first year of the program.

Stream 1: Empowering recreational fishers to improve local fish habitats

Small Grant of \$50,000, to be completed within 18 months of agreement.

This funding stream will remain open year round (no closing date) until an annual allocation for this stream is exhausted. Thereafter applications will be considered in the following financial year.

Stream 2: Partnerships to address critical fish habitat priorities

Large grant of up to \$200,000. To be completed within 2 years of signing.

This funding stream will be subject to an annual opening and closing date (to be announced)

Applicants do not have to contribute funding to their project, however, a project that can demonstrate in-kind or fund contributions provides greater value for money will receive a higher score against the Value for Money / Budget criterion. Contributions can be in various forms including time, resources, or funds.

Funding is not provided to pay for volunteer labour, however volunteer contribution to assist project delivery should be included as an in-kind contribution to the project at a rate of \$40 per hour. To calculate in-kind volunteer contribution, multiply the number of volunteers by the hours they will spend on your project, then multiply by \$40.

7. What are the assessment criteria?

Determine which stream best fits your project activities using the descriptions below. Applications should address all criteria in the Stream they are applying under.

Stream 1: Empowering recreational fishers to improve local fish habitats

Objectives

To build recreational fisher awareness, stewardship, and capacity to improve fishery outcomes by restoring local fish habitat through actions which:

- Conserve, rehabilitate, restore, and protect freshwater, estuarine and coastal ecosystems
- Support community participation, engagement, volunteerism, cultural awareness and education to enhance community knowledge and understanding of fish habitat.



Stream 1 Assessment criteria and weighting

Criteria	Weighting	Description
Local fisher organisational (and community) involvement	30%	Extent to which local recreational fisher organisations (and community) are involved and participate in local fish habitat recovery initiatives.
Restoring local waterways	40%	Demonstrate the need and benefits from restoring local waterways on local fish populations through well targeted on-ground works.
Risk management	10%	Application identifies potential risks to the project and adequate actions to remove, manage or reduce the risks.
Value for Money / Budget	20%	Project represents good value for money by delivering multiple outcomes, high public benefit, reasonable costings, and in-kind contribution.

Stream 2: Partnerships to address critical fish habitat priorities

Objectives

To build organisational and investment partnerships with recreational fishers, NRM agencies and traditional owner groups to leverage knowledge, capacity, and co-funding to undertake priority fish habitat actions which:

- Identify and focus on locations where fish habitat improvement will make a strong contribution to the recovery of important fish populations.
- Conserve, rehabilitate, restore, and protect freshwater, estuarine and coastal ecosystems.

Stream 2 Assessment criteria and weighting

Criteria	Weighting	Description
Partnership alignment	30%	Extent to which project builds effective partnerships and achieves integrated and combined actions with multiple benefits and outcomes.
Identification of priority fish habitat recovery initiatives	30%	Extent to which project demonstrates the need and benefits of fish habitat restoration as a strategic and priority opportunity to improve the fishery.
Risk Management and Demonstrated Capability for delivery of large scale habitat interventions	20%	Application identifies potential risks to the project and adequate actions to remove, manage or reduce the risks.
Value for Money / Budget	20%	Project represents good value for money by delivering multiple outcomes, high public benefit, reasonable costings and in-kind contribution. Seeking funding leverage (cash and in-kind).

Assessments

Applications will be checked for eligibility to make sure that the applicant and their project activities are eligible for funding. Eligible applications will be assessed by a panel of VFA and Arthur Rylah Institute staff.

The panel will assess the list of recommended projects against the relevant assessment criteria.

8. What supporting documents will need to be provided?

Depending on your organisation and project activities, applicants must provide all of the following relevant documents with the application for it to be eligible. Failure to provide one of the following relevant documents with the application may result in the application being set aside and considered ineligible.

Project Activity	Supporting Documentation Required
All applications	<p>A certificate of insurance demonstrating provision of insurance to safeguard volunteers and participants involved in the funded activities, including public liability insurance of at least \$10 million and personal accident insurance.</p> <p>Please note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where your Land Manager's insurance covers your group (for example Catchment Management Authority(s)), please upload the Letter of Support in place of the Certificate of Insurance in the Grants Online Portal Application Form. If your group has a similar arrangement, please discuss with the VFA.• Where you are covered by insurance through membership with an organisation such as Landcare Victoria Incorporated, please upload evidence of current membership status (membership certificate in place of certificate of insurance).
If your project involves on-groundwork, changing a site in some way and/or events on Crown land	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written support from the relevant public land manager/s or private land holders to undertake the activity.
If your project includes a project delivery partner/s	Letter/s of support from partner organisation/s that are directly involved in delivery of the project.

9. What are the funding conditions?

Funding agreements

Successful applicants must enter into a funding common funding agreement with the VFA which can be viewed at <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-common-funding-agreement>

Acknowledging the Victorian Government's support

Successful applicants are expected to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support for this funding.

Payment

Agreed payments will be made as long as:

- the funding agreement has been signed by both parties; and
- other terms and conditions of funding continue to be met.

Funding is limited and not all project applications can or will be supported. It is anticipated that each year the program will run for as long as budget remains. Advice of any change will be widely publicised.

Monitoring & acquittal

Grant recipients are required to comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement. This may include progress reports, site inspections, completion reports and maintaining acquittal documentation. Up to 80% of grant funding will initially be allocated for a project; the remaining 20% of project funding will be allocated on the satisfactory completion of the project (and acquittal).

10. What is the application process?

Applications are submitted online using the VFA **Smarty Grants Online portal**.

Applications consist of:

Step 1 – Completion of an online application form via the VFA Smarty Grants Online portal.

Step 2 – Supporting documentation uploaded to the VFA Smarty Grants.

Make sure your application is submitted by the grants closing date 1 March 2024.

If an application is incomplete, including required supporting documentation, the Assessment Panel Chair in consultation, may exercise their discretion to request the missing information from the applicant within a specified time **or** the application will be assessed based on the documents submitted.

11. Additional information

After reading these Guidelines if you have any questions, please contact the program administrator at the Victorian Fisheries Authority by emailing fishhabitatfund@vfa.vic.gov.au or visit our webpage www.vfa.vic.gov.au/fishhabitatfund

12. What is the notification process?

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing after the assessment process is completed. All decisions are final and are not subject to further review. Unsuccessful applicants can request feedback on their application.

13. Key dates

Milestone	Stream 1	Stream 2
Applications open	25 October 2023	7 February 2025, 9am
Applications close	Ongoing	2 May 2025, 6pm
Applicants notified	4 weeks after application submitted	8 weeks after application submitted
Project duration	All Stream 1 and 2 projects to be delivered and acquittal by 30 June 2026	
Acquittal reports submitted	As per funding agreements	As per funding agreements



14. Checklist

Read these guidelines before applying and complete the following checklist.

Have you:

- read these guidelines carefully?
- checked if your organisation is eligible for this grant funding?
- checked if your project activities are all eligible for this grant funding?
- spoken to the VFA program administrator about your project and checked eligibility?
- spoken to and obtained written support from relevant land managers for your project (if it's an on-ground project)?
- prepared the required and appropriate supporting documents and checked they are appropriate file types?
- determined the most appropriate stream to apply under?
- checked that you would be able to comply with all relevant laws and regulations in delivery of your activity?

15. Supporting information

The following information about fish habitats status, restoration drivers, activities, guidelines, and other resources may assist applicants when preparing funding applications.

Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan

[Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan.pdf - VFA](#)

Freshwater Fisheries Habitat (overview)

[Freshwater Fish Habitat - VFA](#)

Improving the management of Instream Woody Habitat (Arthur Rylah Institute)

[Instream Woody Habitat - \(ari.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Repurposing timber (removed from road projects) for waterway rehabilitation.

[Timber for Fish Guidelines.pdf - \(ari.vic.gov.au\)](#)

State of the Bays report (2016)

[State of the Bays 2016 Report - CES](#)

Vic Catchments Website - What CMA area am I in?

[viccatchments.com.au](#)

