



SCALLOP FISHERMANS ASSOCIATION INC

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Travis Dowling

CEO,
Victorian Fisheries Authority

Thank you for your letter dated 15 February 2018.

The Scallop Fisherman's Association Inc take this opportunity to respond and make the following observations about the content of your letter and the attached Background / Summary document.

The members of our industry, career, lifelong fishermen and our families know better than anyone the state of the Victorian Scallop Fishery. We have a deep and enduring relationship with our marine environment.

Our voice is largely unheard when compared to large industry organisations, not experienced in practical matters, pertaining to our industry or in fact, in locating or in identifying techniques and methods and fishing grounds that involve our industry.

Our historical consultation and outspoken efforts to make a visible and clear link between Seismic activity and the depletion and damage to our traditional Scallop grounds has only ever gained superficial recognition.

The impact of this Seismic activity on Scallop stocks and in fact to other fisheries does not seem to gain the recognition and observance it deserves from Regulatory bodies and Government.

We refute the methodology and process of assessment as outlined in your letter.

For the record...we state again that our industry was promised a sustainable Scallop quota with the reduction of our licences. The Victorian Fisheries Authority was delivered a sustainable and profitable Scallop Fishery to manage as the custodians and managers of our Victorian industry.

The reality is that the findings of the survey, when released in March 2018, will show that Scallop stocks are seriously impacted, as a direct result of the continued Seismic bombardment of our scallop beds over the last 15 years. They are not as a result of over fishing in the East Gippsland Scallop beds.

This Seismic bombardment has only occurred or taken place, within Victorian waters in the 20 nautical mile zone. It has continued unhindered

It seems that the only reason that the abundance survey is carried out is to justify the CarbonNet Project grant funds. Nothing has changed since the last survey in 2012.

The simple answer is that we do not get regeneration and breeding of spat in the study area, due to the continued Seismic bombardment.

Every study has been carried out (taken place) in December – February. It is common knowledge that scallops mature after their first year, but do not spawn until their second year, normally between late winter and early spring.

The larval scallops drift as plankton for up to six weeks before their first settlement, when attach to a hard surface such as seaweed or mussel and oyster shells and remain attached until attaining a growth of around 6mm in length. The small scallops then detach themselves and settle into bottom sediments and bury in so that only the top flat shell is visible. The juvenile scallops grow quickly and reach a harvestable and marketable size within 18 months.

None of the above Scallop development process can happen in the midst of documented Seismic activity.

It is very unfair to the working licence holders that the scientists do not make the correlation to continued seismic activity. Therefore as a result, they are not contributing any new or worthy contribution to the fishing industry in their findings.

The end consequence is that they continue to provide flawed findings to the Government (Victorian Fisheries) in each study.

WHY IS THIS SO?

To repeat... Since 1998 we were promised sustainable quotas as a part of the rationalisation of the Victorian Scallop Fleet licences.

If this is not going to happen our industry needs a return to a viable daily quota.

All that we have received was a division of our traditional fishing grounds and a reduction of 100 Commonwealth Licences, that were then divided into three fishing grounds and YOU then created 300 licences.

There is no other sustainable fishery that can survive on the equivalent of 300 Scallop Licences.

Your division of our industry leaves Victorian Scallop fishing families in a non-viable operational state.

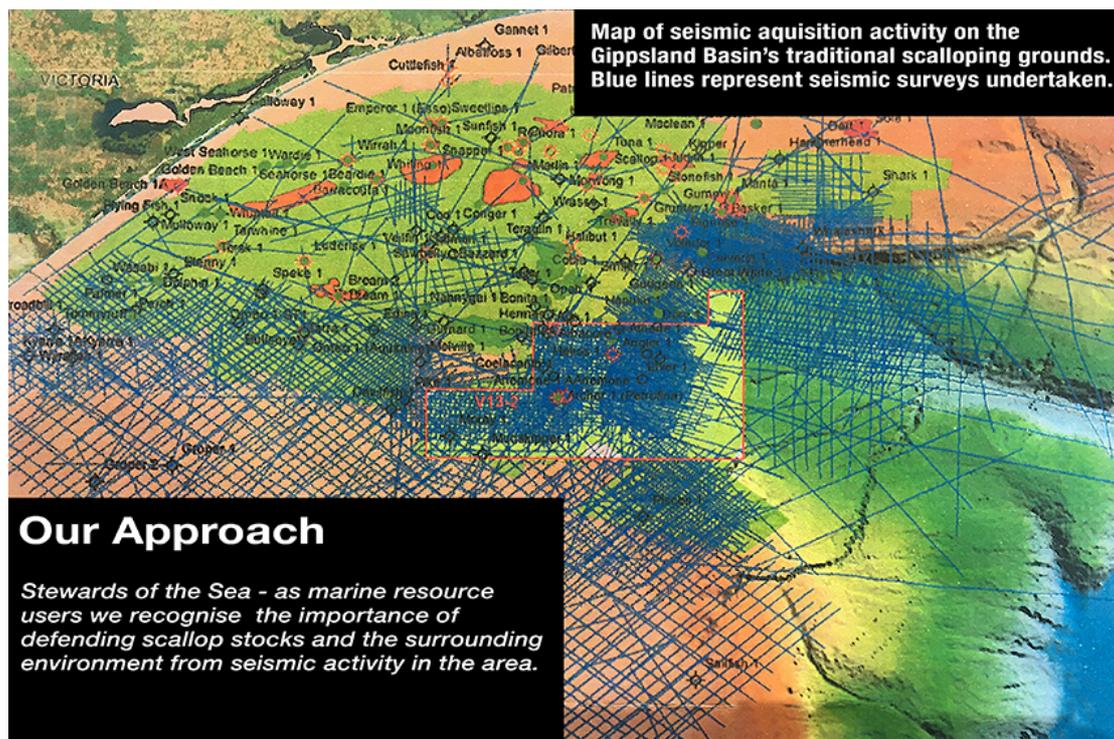
HOW DO WE GET A RETURN ?

Our industry has continued to pay every fee and impost as metered out by government. It is very unfair for the industry to pay SIV (Seafood Industry Victoria) \$40,000.00 every year as we get NO support as evidenced this year by the findings of CarbonNet.

Our industry has not gainfully worked for the past 15 years as a consequence of our support of SIV.

WHAT IS IN IT FOR US ?

Our industry is being deceived by Government, hiding behind the flawed findings of Scientists who continue to survey the same fishery that has been devastated by continued Seismic blasting, without making the co relation to the Seismic activity.



(illustration)

It is important that we make clearly visible, the information in this graphic, it has been disregarded in the past. *The Scientists do not report the truth and the "trained monkey" fishermen they employ cannot perform a man's job.*

By this we mean, why are highly qualified and experienced fishermen who can value add and identify key areas of Scallop resources, not included, in the survey process.

It is very important that the vessel and crew who perform the abundance surveys do not have a conflict of interest as in the case of the "Northern Star". On the one hand it carries out the Seismic surveys...whilst on the other hand it is chartered to provide the scientific surveys of the very areas that they have, and continue to destroy with the Seismic surveys.

This is a gross negligence and extreme "conflict of interest" It is imperative that this research is independent from government regulatory agencies, given their vested interest in undertaking seismic activity in the region.

WE SEEK A TRUE INDEPENDENT FINDING INTO THIS CONFLICT.

The Scallop Fishermen's Association Inc. refute the claim that the survey area is over fished or heavily fished. The area is, heavily bombarded by Seismic blasting.

The fact that the burden of this proof rests with us, the Victorian Scallop fishermen is unfair.

The cost to us, the impact on our business and families and the ongoing impact that Seismic activity has on our fishing stocks is even more unfair.

There is an imbalance in the resources of those who undertake Seismic blasting and us, the fishermen, already heavily impacted by the cost of doing business, trying to prove the irrefutable conclusion about the damage to our fishing stocks. This is hard, when government regulatory agencies, support the endless reserves and finances of our opposition, who strive to prove that seismic testing does not create damage.

We do not support the proposed 135 total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for the 2018/19 fishing season.

It seems strange that we are being asked to accept your proposed TACC, even before the survey findings are published by the end of March 2018. Would it not be better for our industry to see the survey findings and then be invited to comment, after the fact, rather than before the fact.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Melissakis', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Steve Melissakis
President
Scallop Fishermans Association Inc

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