

## Initial Phone Survey Summary

As part of FRDC Project 2019/075, researchers from the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) conducted a phone survey of recreational rock lobster fishers in August and September 2020. The survey will provide information on the Victorian recreational rock lobster fishery that is not routinely collected and will inform a diary survey to be conducted during the 2020/21 season.

In the phone survey, respondents were asked a series of questions related to their experience fishing for rock lobster in Victoria, catch and effort in the 2019/20 season, satisfaction with the quality of fishing in the 2019/20 season, impacts on fishing behaviour in the 2019/20 season as a consequence of the bushfires and pandemic, and participation in the tagging program. Survey participants were randomly selected using geographically proportional representation to cover the spread of fishers by postcode across Victoria. The sample was further split evenly between tag accounts that had previously reported tag usage (in any year) and those for which no tag usage had been reported to date. From a gross sample of 399 registered tag accounts, all but 14 had valid phone contact details. Survey responses were obtained from 87% (335) of contactable respondents, key findings are summarised in this report.

### Victorian Recreational Rock Lobster Fishery

A sample of Victorian recreational rock lobster fishers was selected to include an equal split of participants who had registered for but not reported tag usage (not fished) and those who had reported tag usage (fished). The average experience fishing for rock lobster in Victoria was nine years for respondents who had not fished and 14 years for respondents who had fished (Figure 1).

Over half (51%) of the respondents registered for tags in all three seasons of the program, while 24% registered for two of the seasons and 25% for only one of the seasons. The majority (66%) of respondents fished in each of the seasons they registered for, but 16% fished in only some of the seasons they were registered for, and 18% did not fish in any of the seasons they registered in.

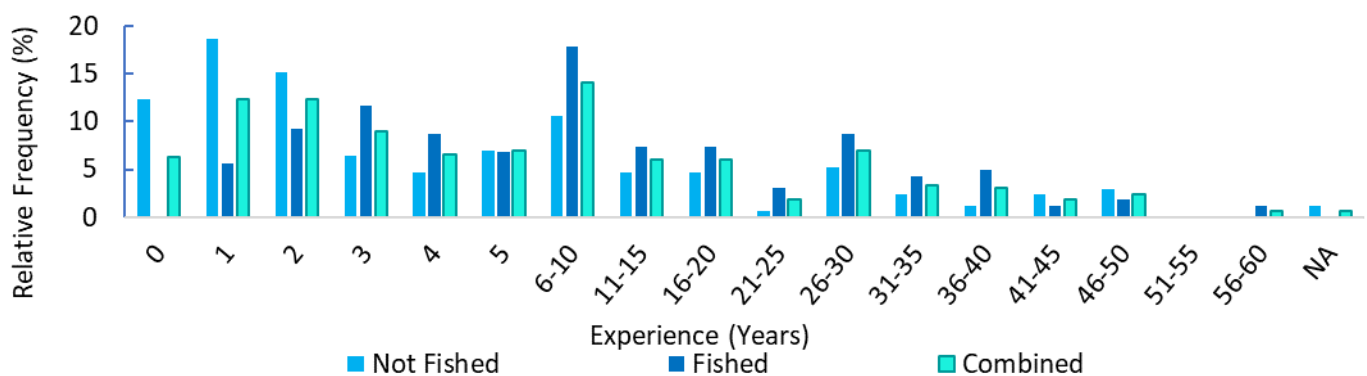


Figure 1: Years of experience fishing for rock lobster in Victoria survey respondents, as a percentage of the total survey sample. NA not answered.

## Fisher Satisfaction with the 2019/20 Season

Fisher satisfaction with the 2019/20 season was high among respondents that fished for rock lobster, with 72% of respondents either very satisfied or quite satisfied with the quality of the fishery (Figure 2). For the 17% of respondents that were not satisfied or not at all satisfied, 81% indicated that their dissatisfaction came from issues around low abundance of legal sized lobster and difficulty obtaining catch.

The majority of respondents (57%) indicated that the proportion of successful trips was about the same as previous years, and 10% thought that the proportion has increased. However, 27% believed the proportion of successful trips had decreased on previous years, and the remaining 6% were unsure.

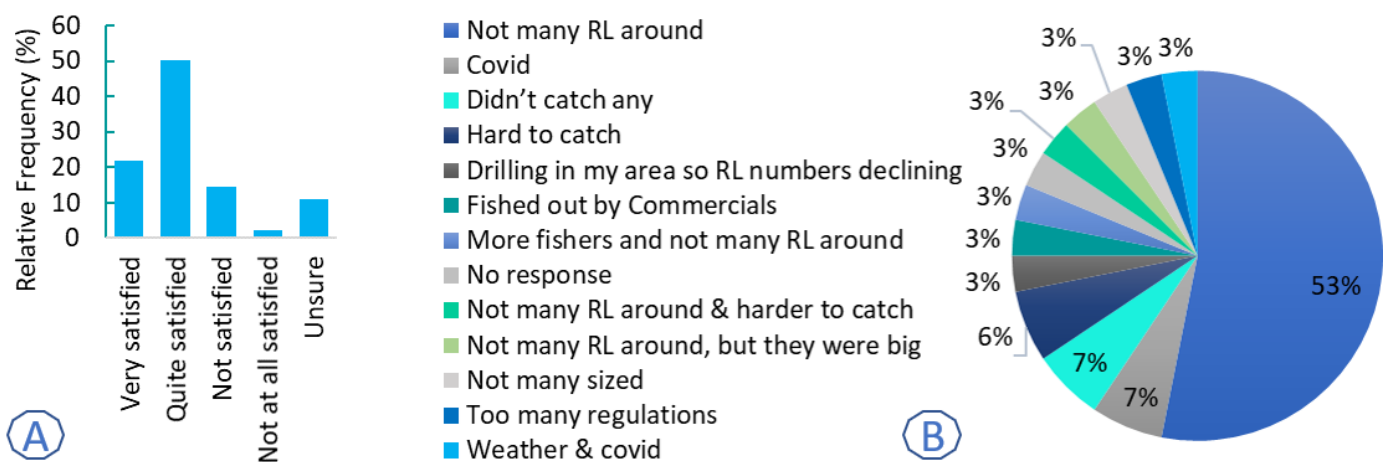


Figure 2: (A) Fisher satisfaction with the quality of rock lobster fishing in the 2019/20 season; and (B) Reasons given for dissatisfaction.

## Impact of Bushfires and Pandemic on the 2019/20 Season

The survey provided an opportunity to gauge the impact of the 2019/20 bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2020/21 fishing season. Only 17% of respondents stated that the bushfires had an impact on their rock lobster fishing, while for the remaining 83% there was little or no impact on their expected fishing activity for the season. COVID-19 restrictions had a greater impact on fishing, with 59% of respondents having cancelled planned fishing trips due to the pandemic, while the remaining 41% had no plans to fish.

Of the responders who had not fished for rock lobster in the 2019/20 season, COVID-19 was most often listed as both the primary (17%) and secondary (32%) reason for not fishing. Other reasons recreational fishers did not participate in the 2019/20 season included work commitments, a lack of time, and weather (Figure 3).

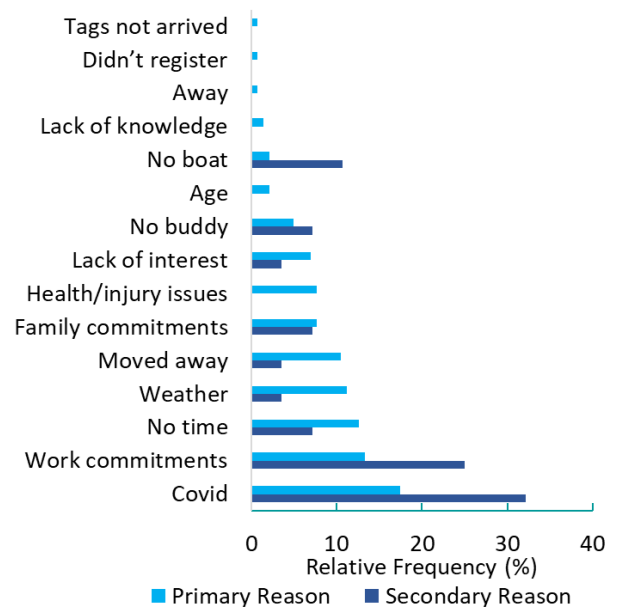


Figure 3: Primary and secondary reasons registered Victorian recreational fishers did not fish for rock lobster in 2019/20 season.

## Catch, Effort and Catch Rate (2019/20 Season)

Respondents who fished in the 2019/20 season reported catching a total of 845 lobster based on 1,397 fishing days, equivalent to an overall catch rate of 0.6 lobster/day.

The reported catch from the Eastern Zone was 389 lobster for 720 fishing days, representing a catch rate of 0.5 lobster/fishing day. Those respondents who fished in the Western Zone reported catching 456 lobster over 677 fishing days, at a catch rate of 0.7 lobster/fishing day.

Respondents who fished in the 2019/20 season caught five lobster on average in the Eastern Zone and six lobster in the Western Zone (Figure 4). The average days fished in both the Eastern and Western Zones was seven days. Although most respondents reported fishing in only one management zone (48% fished in the Eastern Zone, 43% in the Western Zone) a small proportion (9%) reported fishing in both the Eastern and Western Zones.

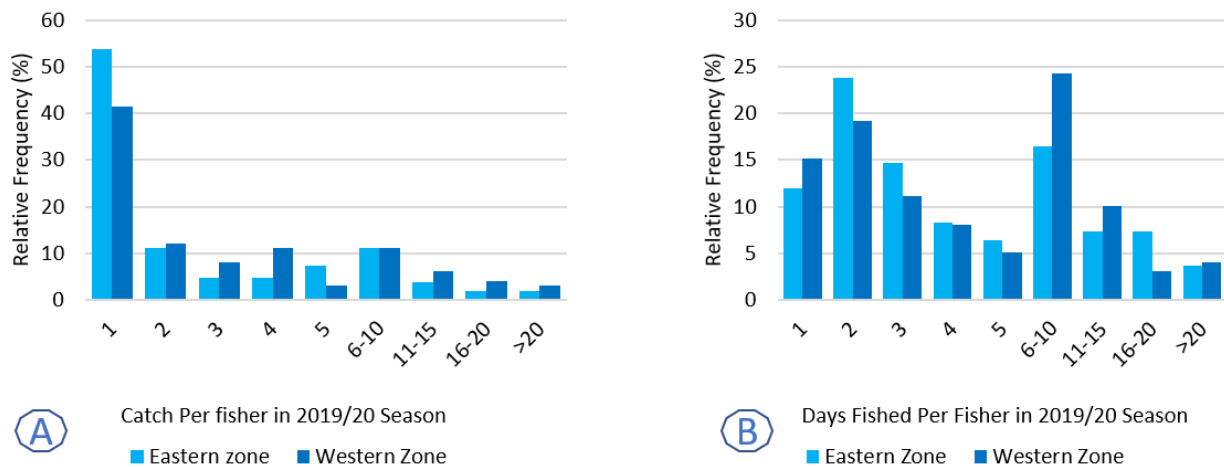


Figure 4: (A) Number of rock lobster caught per survey respondent in the Eastern and Western Zones; and (B) number of days fished per survey respondent in the Eastern and Western Zones in the 2019/20 season.

## Compliance in the 2019/20 Season

Of the respondents who fished for rock lobster in the 2019/20 season, 31% had a compliance check of their tags during the season. Although most respondents (73%) who fished in 2019/20 confirmed that they had never forgotten to report tags, 20% of respondents did indicate that they may have forgotten to report some tags as lost, used, unused or not used (Figure 5).

Thirty-two percent of respondents who fished stated that they had occasionally delayed reporting (by several days or weeks) used tags, while 68% indicated they never delayed reporting used tags. Most respondents (80%) who fished in the 2019/20 stated they were unaware of other fishers either not tagging their lobsters or not reporting used tags, 16% indicated that they were aware of other fishers not reporting tags while 4% were unsure. When asked to gauge the likely occurrence of non-reporting in the fishery, the majority of respondents thought it was occasional (41%) or common (26%), while 18% thought it rarely occurred, and 15% were unsure.

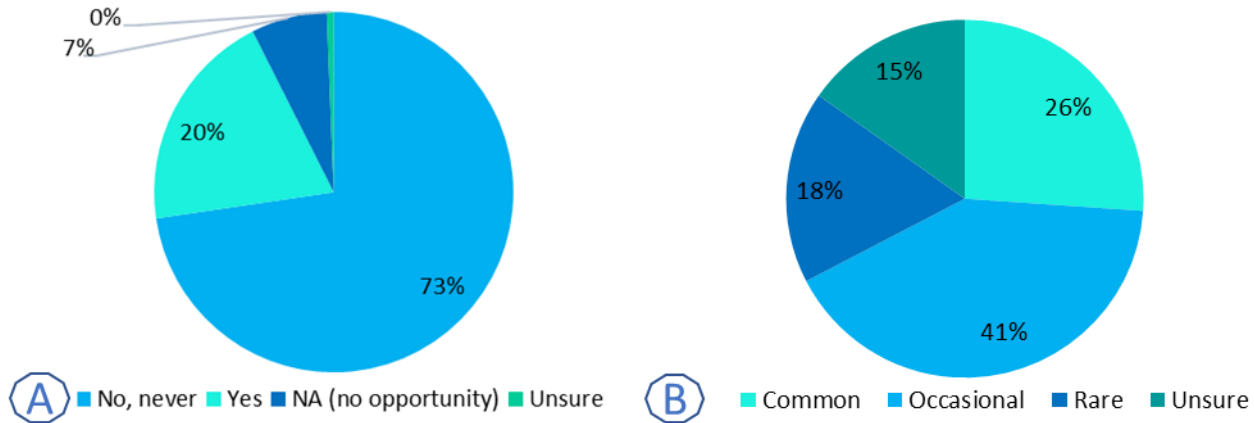


Figure 5: (A) Proportion of respondents who had and had not forgotten to report tags; and (B) perceived level of occurrence of non-reporting by survey respondent.

## Recreational Rock Lobster Tagging Program

Over 95% of respondents reported being aware of the reasons the rock lobster tagging program is in place. The majority (72%) thought the benefits of the recreational rock lobster tagging program were adequately communicated, while 20% indicated that more needs to be done to communicate the benefits, and 8% were unsure.

Only 6% of respondents were aware of and had participated in the citizen science program, while a further 36% indicated some awareness of the program. The majority of respondents (58%) were, however, unaware of the program, suggesting that opportunities exist to better communicate and incentivise participation in the citizen science program (Figure 6).

Generally, respondents considered the catch data reported in the tagging program to be accurate (48%) or at least indicative (30%), only 5% thought the data was inaccurate, with 17% of respondents being unsure as to the data quality.

General satisfaction with the rock lobster tagging program was high, with 87% of respondents indicating they are either very or quite satisfied, 9% were either not or not at all satisfied and 4% were unsure (Figure 6). Overall, most respondents (55%) indicated that both the tags and app were easy to use (amongst respondents who had fished in 2019/20 this approval was as high as 90%), 5% considered one component was easy to apply but not the other and fewer than 1% of respondents thought both components were difficult apply (Figure 6). Most of the remaining respondents (38%) indicated that they had yet to use the tags or app.

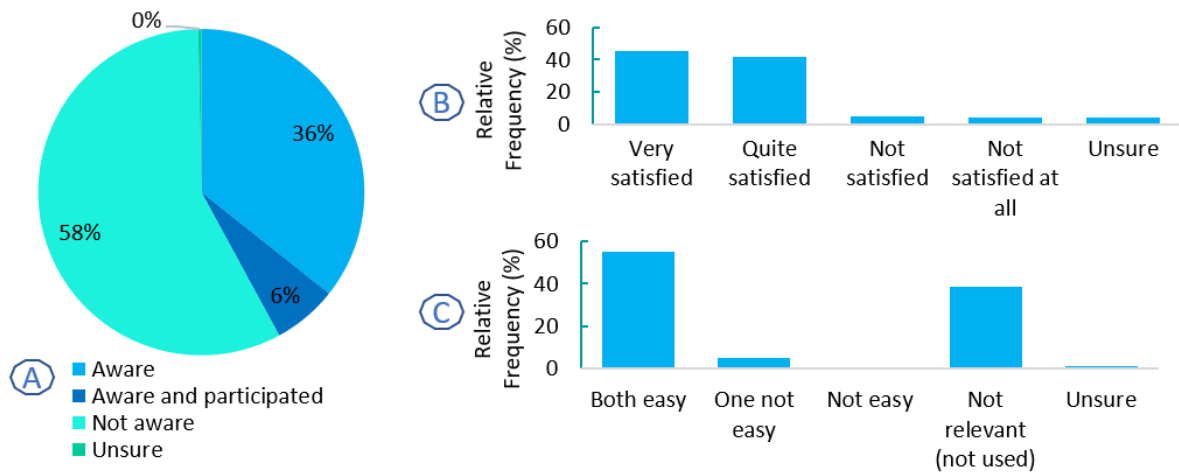


Figure 6: (A) Respondent awareness of the citizen science initiative within the Victorian recreational rock lobster tagging program; (B) Overall respondent satisfaction with the tagging program, and (C) ease of using the tags and app.

## 2020/21 Diary Survey

In the 2020/21 season, we will be conducting a diary survey of randomly-selected Victorian recreational rock lobster fishers who will collect additional information on catch and effort, such as zero catch fishing trips. You may be contacted to participate.

