

Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee

Chair's Summary – Meeting #3

The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee held its third meeting on Thursday 14 January 2021 in person at Port Welshpool. The meeting largely focused on management of commercial seine netting and a short presentation on seagrass. Key discussions and outcomes from that meeting were as follows:

1. Mr Scott Elliot (Yarram Yarram Landcare Network) presented on the seagrass restoration project which is now into its third season:
 - YYLN is working with commercial and recreational anglers, Landcare volunteers, the tourism sector, and Parks Victoria on this project, which is considered Australia's largest community-based restoration project.
 - Multiple commercial fishers have been donating their time and use of their boats towards this initiative. The in-kind contribution from the fishing community exceeds \$500,000 over the past three years. Part of the aim in restoring seagrass habitat is to make a stronger and more resilient fishery for the future.
 - All members agreed that communications on this project should be shared as far and wide as possible. It was noted that funding for the project was soon to run out. Yarram Yarram Landcare plans to apply for the next round of the Victorian Government's Large Recreational Fishing Grants Program.
2. A comprehensive review of all commercial management arrangements for the fishery has not been completed since the last fishery management planning process for Corner Inlet in 1995. An agreed action to take forward to the next meeting was for a complete list of the current input and output controls, along with external influential factors (e.g. the weather), to be presented and analysed as a group to help assess their continued suitability for the fishery.
3. Several proposals and ideas for managing seine netting effort have been put forward by stakeholders in recent years. The VFA presented two feasible options for managing seine netting effort differently, which could provide more flexibility for fishers. The second option below would also reduce latent effort in the fishery, better demonstrate sustainability and provide for more adaptable management.

Options presented:

- a more flexible limit than 2 per day (e.g. such as a maximum of 3 per day but no more than 6 per week).
- Individual tradable seine net shots (a form of annual quota on seine fishing effort)

There was a strong consensus from commercial fishers that in their view the 2-seine shots per day (midnight to midnight) rule has proven to be effective in managing seine fishing effort and demonstrated sustainability over recent decades. Commercial fishers are likely to be reluctant to change this input control due to the perception of increased effort (observations on water of fishers completing more than 2 shots per day) impacting social licence, the possibility of not being able to fish each day in good weather weeks, and likely increase in effort that would occur for mesh netting (under current regulations).

4. Concerns around the possibility of species quota being introduced were raised by commercial representatives. The VFA acknowledged there are challenges with implementing species quotas (i.e. kgs) in multi-species fisheries however noted that this form of management can be done effectively and is considered best-practice for most fisheries. Commercial fishing

representatives noted that in order to understand the costs and benefits and support further discussions on quota, the commercial sector would want to know what science would support a quota management regime for the fishery, what the fees would look like, and the allocation process. Concerns were also raised for potential increase in fish prices and loss of support from the local community if quota were to be introduced.

5. FutureFish Foundation is keen to support the continued existence of the commercial fishery and will pursue a Memorandum of Understanding with industry about future resource sharing and access.
6. Corner Inlet commercial fishers Bill and Damian Knibbs (guest attendees at this meeting) presented a range of ideas for managing seine netting effort in the fishery, including a defined fishing area per licence per trip or paddock concept. The VFA noted the ideas but also recognized that the Fisheries Notice which has been out for consultation could meet many of the same objectives (if implemented).
7. The VFA advised that consultation on the proposed Fisheries Notice is now closed. A decision would be made very soon, and the final Fisheries Notice could be implemented in the next 2-3 weeks.
8. The Committee noted the planned trip on commercial fishing boats the following day would not be possible due to the weather. Commercial fishers invited Steering Committee members to line up a time that works for them at any point in the future.

The VFA acknowledged need for continued discussion around commercial fishing management arrangements at the next meeting. This will take place in February and will focus on the mesh netting component of the fishery.

Dallas D'Silva
Chair
January 2021