The Hon Jaala Pulford
Minister for Agriculture
1 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3000

Dear Minister

**2018-2020 STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS FOR THE VICTORIAN FISHERIES AUTHORITY**

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2017 setting out your Statement of Expectations (SOE) for the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA).

This letter confirms the VFA’s commitment to delivering key governance and performance objectives and targets, aimed at improving the administration and enforcement of regulation and thus reducing its cost impact on business and the community, over the period 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2020, or until otherwise amended.

I acknowledge that your SOE and this response will be published on the VFA and DEDJTR websites.

**Our plan to meet the SOE improvement priorities**

The VFA will meet your priorities for improvement over the life of this SOE by the specific performance improvement activities and initiatives outlined in the following plan.

1. Timeliness

The VFA acknowledges your expectation the Authority contributes to the government’s commitment to reducing regulatory burden by 25% by ensuring that fisheries regulations are efficient, risk-based, proportionate, transparent and effective.

The VFA will to continue to work with DEDJTR over the life of this SOE to identify areas where regulatory burden could be reduced. This will be informed by stakeholder consultation and a risk-assessment of fisheries management and compliance issues, as well as consideration of alternative regulatory tools, including incentive based regulation where appropriate.

The VFA also acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will continue to explore the use of e-technologies to reduce the time, cost and administrative burden associated with the sale of recreational fishing licences (RFL) and other public facing services.

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will consider how the current catch and effort reporting arrangements for commercial fisheries could be improved in the future, to minimise burden to fishers and ensure the most appropriate information is obtained for fishery management purposes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Review (jointly with DEDJTR) the sunsetting *Fisheries Regulations 2009* to identify areas where regulatory burden could be reduced  | Develop options paper for consideration by government by 31 August 2018 |
| Plan, build & implement an online method for agents selling recreational fishing licences on behalf of the VFA, replacing the current paper based system and significantly reducing agent burden and VFA costs. | 50% of agent sales to be completed online by 1 July 2018. |
| Transition key commercial fisheries (abalone, rock lobster, giant crab, pipi, wrasse) to a single electronic catch reporting system | Confirm user requirements in conjunction with Seafood Industry Victoria and complete business case by December 2018 |

1. Risk-based strategies

The VFA will continue to deliver existing management plans for key fisheries throughout the life of this SOE including for the abalone, rock lobster/giant crab, and eel fisheries.

The VFA commits to using a risk-based approach in the development of any future fishery management plans, to ensure that plans are developed on a priority basis for key or high-risk fisheries.

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will investigate ways of collecting better catch, effort and value data from the recreational and commercial fishing sectors.

The VFA will to conduct a Victorian recreational fishing survey within the next 12 months, consistent with the Government’s Target One Million election commitments. The VFA will report the outcomes of the survey within three months of its completion.

The VFA also acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will continue to implement its intelligence-informed risk-based compliance model, balancing a focus on areas of highest risk, while retaining a base model of cover across all fisheries to maintain community confidence and create a general deterrence.

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will contribute to the safety of Victorians through minimising the risk of shark hazards in Victorian waters, promoting the safe use of fisheries resources and acting as a support agency for aquatic related emergencies under the *Emergency Management Act 2013*.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Deliver recreational fishing survey (report on outcomes within three months of completion) | Complete survey by 31 March 2018 and report on outcomes by 30 June 2018 |
| Implement Freshwater Fishery Management Plan | Implement key priorities with partner agencies by June 2020 |
| Monitor the performance of the wrasse fishery in accordance with the harvest strategy | Report on status in June annually |

1. Compliance related assistance and advice

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that, in dealing with stakeholders, all VFA Fisheries Officers will be:

* Helpful
* Respectful
* Impartial
* Proportionate in implementing compliance activities
* Predictable
* Transparent

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will continue to deliver a range of educational programs that are specifically designed to improve compliance and promote sustainable and responsible fishing. This should include the implementation of initiatives focusing on promoting responsible fishing practices, including the safe use of fisheries resources.

The VFA will continue to target these initiatives and educational programs to the needs of stakeholders and implement them in an accessible way that recognises the diversity of fisheries stakeholders.

The VFA will engage with stakeholders to seek feedback on the clarity and comprehensiveness of educational programs and guidance material.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Develop (in consultation with community representatives) new fisheries advisory products targeted at identified high risk communities | Report annually on audience reach and end user acceptance |
| Review the composition and reach of education programs (including those of the Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre) and report back on improvement opportunities, including through use of digital channels | Report by 31 August 2018 |

1. Incentive-based regulation

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority, in consultation with fishing sectors, considers incentive-based regulatory approaches as a means of reducing compliance costs.

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that such approaches may include rewarding a track record of compliance or an investment in risk-mitigating processes with less frequent inspection cycles.

Any data collected on fisher behaviour and compliance activities will be used to inform this process.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Investigate the feasibility of reducing compliance inspections by introducing a vessel monitoring system for the commercial fishing sector | Report by June 2019 |

1. Cooperation amongst regulators

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will work with DEDJTR and across Victorian government agencies to sustainably grow recreational fishing, improve access where appropriate and continue value-adding commercial fisheries.

The VFA also acknowledges your expectation that, in relation to aquaculture management, the Authority will to continue to work with DEDJTR, the Commonwealth and PrimeSafe Victoria to implement relevant export standards and agreements, including the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program.

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that Fisheries Officers will share their knowledge and expertise with other DEDJTR and partner agency authorised officers to build a more effective and efficient compliance management system across government.

The VFA also commits to continue to assist other regulators, such as DELWP, the EPA and Transport Safety Victoria in ensuring fishers comply with relevant environmental and marine safety laws.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Identify, in consultation with recreational fishers and land managers, new habitat and access investment priorities for delivery from 2019-2022 | Complete by October 2018 |
| Collaborate with DELWP Wildlife Officers in ensuring compliance with protected species interaction reporting | Report on outcomes annually  |
| Support Marine Safety Victoria’s program objectives through conducting recreational vessel inspections | Report on outcomes annually |

1. Stakeholder consultation and engagement

The VFA will to continue to actively engage and work with commercial and recreational fishers, aquaculture licence holders and Traditional Owner groups who have a direct interest in decisions that affect their fishing entitlements.

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will pursue genuine engagement, partnership and participation with Traditional Owner Groups, in accordance with the DEDJTR *Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan 2016-18*. The VFA also commits to working with the Aboriginal community and fishing stakeholders to pursue the outcomes of the Victorian Aboriginal Fishing Strategy.

The VFA further acknowledges your expectation that the Authority enhance relationships with other stakeholders with an interest in fisheries management, including community groups, environment groups and other relevant stakeholders.

The VFA commits to build on contemporary communications approaches, such as Facebook, Instagram Snapchat and Twitter, to engage with Victorian fishers and stakeholders in ways that recognise social, generational, cultural and linguistic diversity.

The VFA further commits to participate in the many community events and festivals that are held across the State each year, with a continued focus on growing participation in sustainable recreational fishing activities and encouraging responsible fishing practices.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Establish partnerships with educational institutions to provide training opportunities for Traditional Owners to improve their capacity and capability to contribute to fisheries management on country | Establish partnerships and conduct initial training sessions by December 2018 |
| Increase the use of targeted engagement of priority stakeholder groups such as women fishers on the Facebook platform  | Report every six months on progress |
| Investigate the use of the *WeChat* social networking platform to increase the VFA’s engagement with Chinese language speakers | Report on feasibility and implementation options by December 2018 |
| Plan and deliver new events in conjunction with stakeholders including local government, Regional Development Victoria, Seafood Industry Victoria and VRFish | Deliver a minimum of one new event in both 2018 and 2019 |

1. Accountability and transparency

The VFA acknowledges that its establishment provides an opportunity to improve the transparency of processes and practices in fisheries management.

The VFA will work to improve transparency and timeliness in publicly reporting stock status, fishery interactions with protected species and fish stocking.

The VFA will ensure that it collects, stores, manages and distributes data and personal information consistent with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and relevant state and Commonwealth legislation.

The VFA commits to commencing a review of its cost recovery system within six months to ensure the model is still relevant, efficient and providing appropriate outcomes for both government and the commercial fishing sector.

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority has effective accountability mechanisms in place for fisheries representative bodies, through funding agreements that include effective and transparent governance and performance measures.

The VFA commits to contributing to delivering the *Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, including appointing 50 per cent women to all committees and working groups. The VFA will also consider the *Gender Equality Strategy* in the recruitment of VFA staff and the appointment of VFA staff to senior positions.

The VFA Board will establish and document appropriate processes to deliver its governance requirements under the *Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016*.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Make publicly available standard processes for fishery management decisions, including how stakeholders can provide input to the process | Deliver by December 2019 |
| Report on stock status of key Victorian stocks | Update and publish annually on the VFA website |
| Review Fisheries cost recovery system  | Commence review by June 2018 and complete by June 2019 |
| Implement recommendations from KPMG review | Implement relevant actions documented in the VFA’s Two Year Transition Plan by June 2019 |

1. Clear and consistent regulatory activities

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will continue to review and refine approaches to deliver efficient and effective risk-based regulatory outcomes, noting the minimum level of regulatory intervention should be applied to achieve the outcomes sought.

The VFA acknowledges your expectation that the Authority will design and roll out an annual education and enforcement strategic plan.

The VFA commits to delivering actions to achieve these eight improvements and targets, in consultation with the Red Tape Commissioner, business and the broader community as appropriate.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Improvement strategy** | **Target** |
| Deliver education and enforcement strategic plan | Deliver annual action plan by June each year |
| Meet with Red Tape Commissioner to discuss SOE progress and identify improvement opportunities | VFA CEO to convene bi-annual meetings with the Commissioner  |

**Reporting and evaluation**

The VFA will report on progress against these SOE performance targets as part of its annual reporting process, covering:

* current baseline levels for performance targets set in this SOE (where relevant)
* activities to be undertaken to reach the performance targets and improvements set out in this SOE.

The SOE performance targets will also be incorporated into the VFA’s Business Plan, and your SOE and this response will be published on the VFA’s website upon approval.

The VFA and DEDJTR will jointly undertake an evaluation of this SOE following its completion.

I look forward to reporting against its achievements of the VFA over the life of this SOE.

Thank you for your direction on the governance and regulatory performance of Victoria’s fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

Yours sincerely

**Gail Owen**

Chair