Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishing Alliance

Stephen Beever

Bays & Inlets Fishery Manager

Marine & Estuarine Fisheries

Victorian Fisheries Authority

PO Box 114,2a Bellarine Hwy,

Queenscliff Vic. 3225

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your offer of consultation regarding the bag, size, and slot regulations for Black bream in the Gippsland Lakes.

Preamble

The productivity of the Gippsland Lakes Black bream fishery has declined over the years ln line with the reduction of freshwater inflows into the Gippsland Lakes.

After the commissioning of the Thomson Dam in the 1980’s, Melbourne’s largest water reservoir, over 40% of the freshwater inflows into the Gippsland Lakes have been removed.

After many years of consultation with both the recreational and commercial fishing community, there is a strong consensus that the decline in the stocks of Black bream in the Gippsland Lakes is due to these reduced freshwater inflows.

In response to these declining Black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes, commercial fishing was banned by the Victorian Government in 2019.

Discussion

The rationale for the decision to ban commercial fishing of Black bream in the Gippsland Lakes, was based on the evidence that recreational only harvesting of the remaining bream stocks would provide the highest economic and social return for Victoria.

Further to the end of commercial fishing, the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) consulted and surveyed Victorian recreational fishers on catch reduction strategies to facilitate the rebuilding of Black bream stocks. Key to this strategy, was the objective to reduce the catch effort rate for recreational fishers and encourage increased recreational angler visitation to the Gippsland Lakes.

Recreational fisher surveys at the time showed that 80% of people surveyed supported a bag reduction to 5 Black bream per day from the previous 10.

The VFA subsequently announce that the daily bag limit was being reduced to 7 bream per day, together with a size slot limit.

The Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishing Alliance (GLRFA) welcomed these regulatory changes for Black bream fishing in the Gippsland Lakes, whilst expressing their preference for the 5 bream a day consensus that the surveys had so clearly expressed.

GLRFA advice and recommendations’

During this year the Victorian Government announced that the water required to fill and rehabilitate the Latrobe Valley coal mines, is to be sourced from surface water in the Gippsland Lakes catchment.

Over an unspecified time frame, 2,500 gigalitres or 2,500 billion litres of freshwater inflows will we removed from the tributaries of the Gippsland Lakes and redirected into the coal mine voids.

The amount of water required can also be expressed as approximately 14 years of total average annual inflows into Thomson Dam.

The harvesting of these catchment inflows has already started with the closure of the Hazelwood mine. The Yallourn mine is forecast to close in 2027, and Loy Yang is to close in 2035.

In response to the impending loss of these significant freshwater inflows to the Gippsland Lake, the GLRFA recommends that a precautionary approach be adopted to the future harvesting of Black bream stocks.

The GLRFA believes that there is considerable consensus in the scientific community that reduced freshwater inflows into an estuarine environment is likely to reduce its potential productivity.

The current review of the Gippsland Lakes Black bream fishing regulations provides an opportunity to adopt and incorporate this new information into Black bream stock management.

The GLRFA believes that now that it is certain that in the foreseeable future freshwater inflows will be declining into the Gippsland Lakes, the precautionary principle needs to be invoked.

Together with the existing recreational consensus, the GLRFA recommends that the existing slot and size limits remain and the bag limit for Black bream in the Gippsland Lakes be now reduced to 5 per day.

Yours truly,

Robert Caune & David Warren