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Dear Luke,

TACC Consultation 2025/26 - Octopus Fishery (Eastern Zone)

Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the draft Octopus Fishery Quota Order and draft Exemption Notice provided for consultation by the VFA.

Thank you for providing a stock assessment report for our information. After reviewing the Catch Per Unit Effort trends for 2016/17 to 2023/24 (Figure 1), there appears to be a reliable pattern suggesting a step change in CPUE from when the fishery was first established (2020/21). The higher level of CPUE (approx. +20%) has now been sustained for three fishing years. In recognition that a change in catch efficiency is indicative of a greater biomass, SIV would like to request that the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) be reviewed with an increase considered for the 2025/26 fishing season. An increase in TACC would allow licence/quota holders to operate more than 1 day a fortnight.

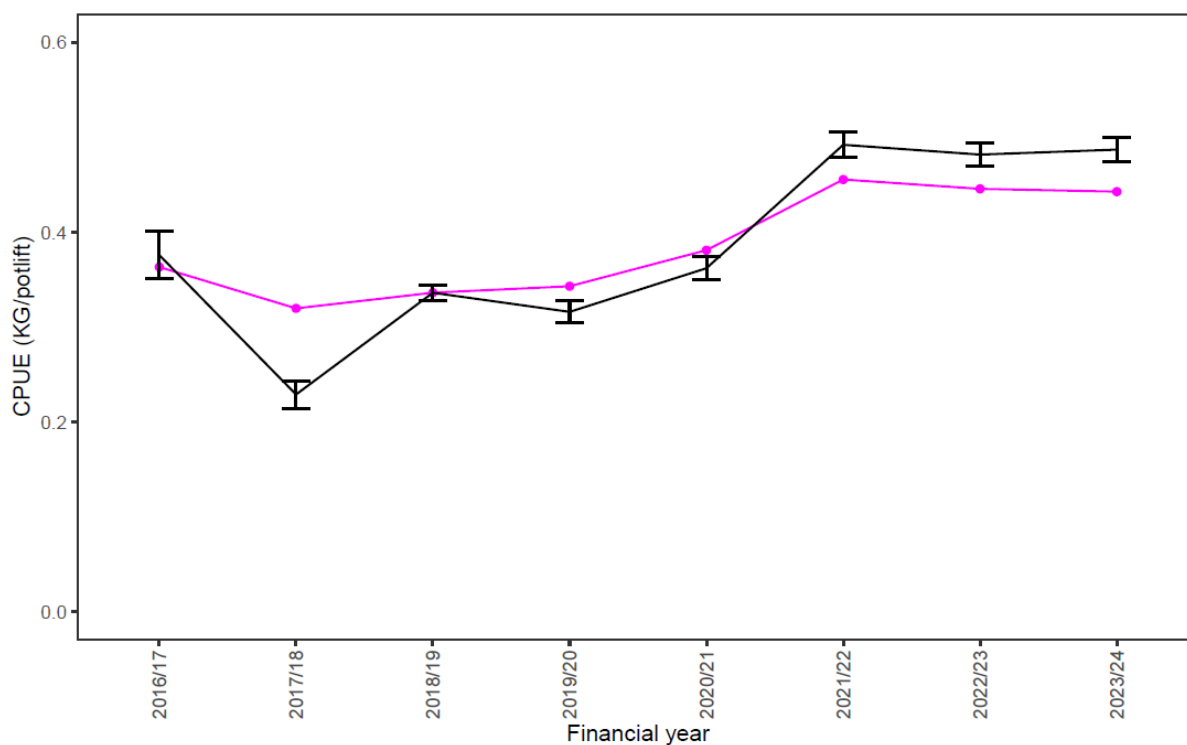


Figure 1: Trends in total octopus CPUE by the Octopus Fishery at fishery-wide scale. (The pink line represents standardised CPUE).

SIV thanks the VFA for acting on a previous request to provide an exemption allowing up to three operators to be engaged on an Octopus Fishery Access licence (Eastern Zone). This is working well and there is a preference from licence holders to see the exemption continue. There were also two other requests from octopus pot fishery licence holders noted at the 2023 TACC meeting that SIV asks the VFA to consider and provide a response on.

1. Licence holders would like greater flexibility in catching slightly over their quota. This would allow them to pull the last line of pots for the year without having to discard product. Licence holders have suggested the current leeway of 20 kg be increased to 5% of quota instead. Licence holders are prepared for any over catch to be counted against their quota for the next year.
2. The VFA has noted that pale octopus do not disperse far from their hatching site, therefore optimising spatial spread of octopus catch across the eastern zone is a key factor in avoiding localised or serial depletion within the zone. A licence holder provided the map in Figure 2 showing the area where they consider potentially viable fishing grounds might exist. For licence holders to risk spending time and effort looking for new fishing grounds they have asked for a small amount of 'experimental quota' in addition to the TACC. CPUE data would need to be kept separate to avoid influencing the total data set.

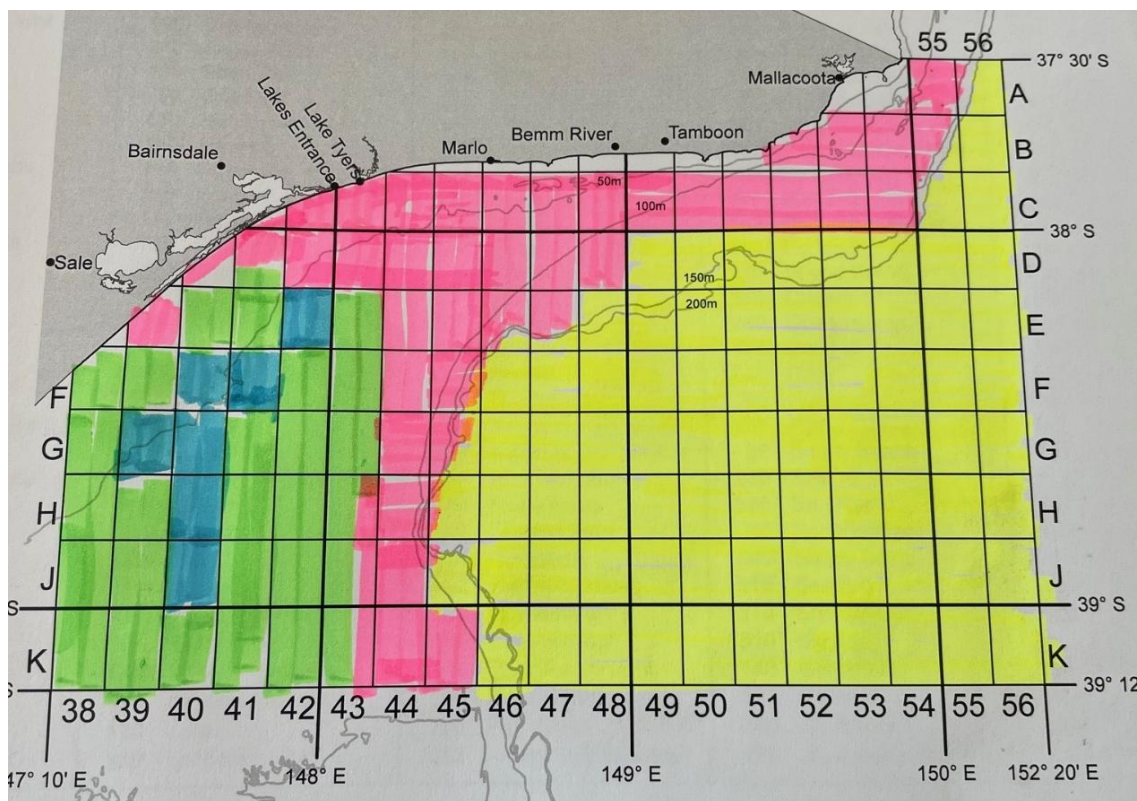


Figure 2: Map of Eastern Zone fishing grid cells provided by a licence holder. The colours added by the licence holder indicate where they consider water is generally too deep to fish (yellow), area most at risk of gear entanglement with trawl (pink), current fishing grounds (blue) and potentially viable fishing grounds (green).

Recommendations:

1. Look at whether Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) can be increased based on three consecutive years of consistently higher CPUE.
2. Continue current exemption allowing up to three operators to be engaged on a licence.
3. Increase the leeway for exceeding annual quota from 20 kg to 5% of quota to avoid discards when lifting the final string of pots for the year. Deduct any over catch against a licence holders' quota for the next year.
4. Issue a small amount of 'experimental quota' in addition to the TACC to encourage licence holders to risk time/effort exploring new ground and spreading effort.
5. Conduct an in-person meeting each year with SIV and licence holders to review the latest stock assessment and fishery management principles.

Supporting sustainable growth of the Eastern Zone Octopus Pot Fishery will provide greater availability of a sought-after species for Victorian seafood consumers. SIV looks forward to helping facilitate further discussion between licence holders and the VFA in efforts to maximise efficiency and productivity within the fishery.