

fishinglines

The magazine of Victoria's Peak Recreational Fishing Body

SPRING 2014

Fish welfare

Snapper survival

Murray cod handling

Future leaders



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Victorian
Recreational
Fishers



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Recreational Fishing Code of Conduct

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VRFish has developed this Code of Conduct for recreational boat, shore, river, stream and jetty fishers in Victoria.

Recreational fishers have a responsibility to look after fisheries resources for the benefit of the environment and future generations of fishers. Recreational fishers should also show respect for other users of the aquatic environment. This Code of Conduct provides guidelines to minimise conflicts on the water, and should be adopted by all recreational fishers.



Awareness of and compliance with fishing regulations



Always seek permission when entering private property



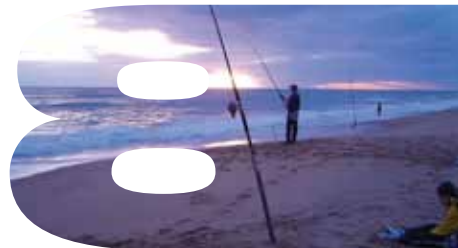
Respect the rights of other anglers and users



Use established access roads and tracks



Protect the environment



Attend to your fishing gear and value your catch



Carefully return undersized, protected or unwanted catch back to the water



Education - pass on your knowledge



Fish species and other organisms must not be relocated/ transferred into other water bodies



Respect indigenous sites and values

For a full version of the Code of Conduct, please go to:
www.vrfish.com.au/Corporate_Documents
Savages Wharf PO Box 538 Williamstown VIC 3016

T 03 9397 6318

E info@vrfish.com.au

W www.vrfish.com.au

f facebook.com/vrfish

t twitter.com/vr_fish

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Representing
Victorian
Recreational
Fishers



Fishing Lines

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Chair: Russell Conway
General Manager: Dallas D'Silva
Senior Program and Partnership Manager
& *Fishing Lines* editor: Michelle Wenner

Savages Wharf
PO Box 538 Williamstown VIC 3016
Ph: 03 9397 6318
Email: info@vrfish.com.au
Web: www.vrfish.com.au

Advertising

Ph: 03 9397 6318
Email: info@vrfish.com.au

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Welcome



The theme for this issue of *Fishing Lines* highlights the initiatives recreational fishers are implementing to address recreational fishing practices and the welfare of fish. Broadly speaking, fish welfare means taking due account of the potential effects of the angling methods we use when fishing to minimise our effects on the well-being and health of fish.

The wellbeing and health of aquatic animals is a primary concern for recreational fishers and the recreational sector has been at the forefront of research and education to promote responsible fishing practices. VRFish supports responsible fishing practices that have been proven to provide for fish welfare such as the use of circle hooks when fishing. We have recently implemented an education campaign focused on providing Victorian fishers with methods to ensure the successful post capture survival of Snapper. The article by Franz Grasser, VRFish Board member describes an excellent education program aimed at maximising the survival of released snapper. This project has been run in partnership with Fisheries Victoria.

At the recent 7th World Recreational Fishing Conference in Brazil, animal welfare activists protested at the start of the conference. Animal welfare was a major theme for the conference and the protest made the issue all the more poignant.

The focus for recreational fishers has to be about what we can do to minimise stress and harm to fish. This is not just about catch and release, it is also equally applicable to fish that a fisher keeps for the dinner table. VRFish is leading the way in this area by delivering education and awareness programs that teach fishers how to quickly dispatch a fish for the dinner plate or release a fish in a way that will maximise its chance of survival.

A "National Code of Practice" for recreational fishing and animal welfare has been developed under the federal "Australian Animal Welfare Strategy"

VRFish supports responsible fishing practices that have been proven to provide for fish welfare such as the use of circle hooks when fishing. We have recently implemented an education campaign focused on providing Victorian fishers with methods to ensure the successful post capture survival of Snapper.

to assist the entire fishing industry to engage in responsible fishing practices when capturing and releasing fish. It is about making sure fishers treat their catch humanely and carefully, minimizing stress on the fish, whether they choose to release it or retain it. Dr Paul Hardy-Smith is a leading fish veterinarian and advisor to VRFish on this issue and has a very insightful article in this edition, not to mention a considered analysis from State Council member, John Willis. VRFish will continue to demonstrate leadership in this area.

Recreational fishing represents thousands of jobs, many of which are in coastal towns and regional areas across the State and provide valuable employment opportunities.

In the lead up to the state election in November, VRFish has developed an aspirational list of improvements and enhancements we believe will ensure the continued development of Victoria as the premier recreational fishing destination in Australia. The "Wish List" has been distributed to political parties to ensure their core policies and investment priorities

recognize the benefits of recreational fishing to the Victorian economy and society. The "Wish List" is all about growing recreational fishing in Victoria over the next 4 years and includes a comprehensive list of future investment priorities (e.g. habitat improvement, stocking, infrastructure, research and co-management) in addition to the funds we raise through our recreational fishing licence fees. The Victorian fishing community commends the investment made by the Government into recreational fishing and recommends the current Recreational Fishing Initiative (RFI) that is due to expire at the end of the financial year be continued and expanded post the state election.

I would like to commend General Manager, Dallas D'Silva and the VRFish Team for the professional manner in which our financial responsibilities have been managed. I would also like to sincerely thank the VRFish Board and State Council members for the enormous effort over the past year. 2014 has been a defining year for our organisation and has demanded a greater contribution from all members to position VRFish for the future.

VRFish will continue to actively represent the 721,000 Victorian recreational fishers that contribute more than 2 billion dollars per annum to the economy of Victoria. VRFish will continue to work to ensure recreational fishing is a high priority for the Victorian government and is highly valued by the Victorian community.

Tight Lines

Russell Conway
Chair

Welcome to the 2nd edition of *Fishing Lines* for 2014! To say the last 12 months has been a busy period for VRFish is an understatement. Over the last year, I have put together a plan to restructure our team at VRFish. Following an extensive recruitment process, Ms Michelle Wenner took up the position of Senior Program and Partnerships Manager in July. Michelle is a great addition to the team; with diverse legal, policy, natural resource management and communication skills.

The remaining part of our new structure that is not yet implemented due to our limited funding is recruiting for the Recreational Fisheries Liaison Manager role. The new role is vital in enhancing communication with grass roots recreational fishers, angling clubs and associations, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse community (CALD) groups.

The proposed position will have strong regional engagement as a key focus and will assist angling clubs in developing concepts and quality applications to the Recreational Fishing Grants program. This has been recognised as an area requiring more targeted VRFish resources. The role will benefit communities, recreational fishers, VRFish and DEPI by helping angling club officials and administrators build competency in effective running of clubs across Victoria.

Having spent my initial time in the role looking at how the organization operates I have invested considerable time and effort towards our annual business plan and funding agreement reporting to DEPI and our members. I am also committed to ensure our financial management continues to meet the appropriate level of scrutiny. I would like to acknowledge the great work of Alison Wheeler, our Finance Officer, along with the Finance Committee in achieving this outcome.

Our Communication Plan has also been revised and this will continue to be the focus for the months ahead, with further improvements to our website, fisher contact

database and membership structure. The VRFish Research and Development Committee has been reinvigorated and includes new members. A Draft VRFish R&D Plan is now being developed.

The Habitat and Water Committee has also been active and is thrilled with the shellfish restoration project in Port Phillip Bay that is led by the Albert Park Angling Club and the Nature Conservancy. This project has potential for enormous ecological and recreational fishing benefits and we applaud the financial contribution from the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security and his Department for making this a reality.

We hope a similar positive outcome can be reached for the Gunbower Creek / Lower Loddon River Native Fish Recovery Plan. This is a flagship project for native fish in Victoria that is waiting to happen. Its vision is to create a trophy Murray cod fishery and establish the region as the "jewel in the fishing crown" of the Murray-Darling Basin. Implementation of the Plan would support thriving populations of native fish, generating increased eco-tourism to the area alongside an innovative irrigation industry. We are working closely with the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the Arthur Rylah Institute scientists and fishery managers on the proposal.

VRFish has been successful in securing grant funding for a comprehensive assessment of the economic contribution recreational fishing makes to the State of Victoria. The last study done by Ernst and Young was a landmark achievement for VRFish and Victoria. It was more than 6 years ago and done when much of Victoria was in drought. A new study, using up to date data will be vital for future advocacy and to assist recreational fisheries policy and planning in the years ahead.

Russell Conway, VRFish Chairman, new State Council delegate Anthony McGrath of the Ballarat District Anglers Association and I have just returned from the 7th World Recreational Fisheries Conference

...it is great to see VRFish is recognised as more than just a body that consults and represents the views of recreational fishers. We are a crucial part of the fisheries co-management framework that establishes policy with other users on complex and sensitive issues such as resource sharing.

in Brazil. We were privileged to attend this important event with the support of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and RecFishing Research. Not only did we manage to put VRFish on the world stage, we were able to learn so much from the high quality speakers such as Dr Robert Arlinghaus from Germany.

Finally, it is great to see VRFish is recognised as more than just a body that consults and represents the views of recreational fishers. We are a crucial part of the fisheries co-management framework that establishes policy with other users on complex and sensitive issues such as resource sharing. Given our extensive networks throughout the recreational fishing community, we are an important vehicle to achieve the adoption of responsible recreational fishing practices and behaviors.

Until our next edition - good fishing....stay safe on or near the water.

Dallas D'Silva
General Manager

Love your fishing and...respect the fish you catch

by **PAUL HARDY-SMITH**

Veterinarian, Panaquatic Health Solutions Pty Ltd

Since I was four years old I have loved to fish. It's probably the reason why as a veterinarian the only animals I now work with are fish...We are lucky here in Australia to be able to go out and catch our own fish if we want to. I myself hope to be doing this for a long time, and want to ensure future generations can too.

And I'm not alone. Many Australians love to fish. We do it to socialise, to get "out in nature" and if we are lucky to bring home something fresh to feed the family. We can be proud of our efforts, and often want to share our success with others. Sometimes the photo or video appears on our preferred social media platform before we even are off the water!

The world in which we are living is changing though. Urbanization and modernisation are happening at an incredible rate. While we may be getting "out in nature" on a regular basis, many others are not and people's experience of nature and wildlife is reducing. This may in part be why the attitudes towards fishing are changing in some parts of our society.

Currently, recreational fishing in Australia is fortunate to have a strong social license to operate. This means we have ongoing approval and broad social acceptance in our community towards fishing as a recreational pursuit. Yet this is being challenged in other countries. Much of the rising concerns centre around fish welfare, even though there is considerable scientific uncertainty as to whether fish are capable of feeling pain or are able to suffer. People's decisions though are not always based on science. For many, it is an ethical decision.

In Germany, for example, effective lobbying by anti-angling groups has led to catch and release fishing being restricted or entirely banned¹. Germany has animal legislation that specifies that nobody is allowed to inflict pain, suffering, or damage on a vertebrate animal (animals with backbones) without a reasonable purpose. This includes fish. German society, through the courts, has deemed that catching a fish with the intention to release it is not a "reasonable purpose".

As a veterinarian I am professionally concerned about the welfare of all animals. I have been fortunate to have been involved in the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) over the last eight years or so. AAWS was a major government initiative designed to create a more consistent and effective animal welfare system across this country. It had a number of working groups, including one entirely devoted to fish. Unfortunately recent government funding cuts has also cut funding for this strategy.

Fortunately AAWS has left a strong legacy, including a project that is just nearing completion in which my company, Panaquatic Health Solutions, collaborated with VRFish. We have been concerned about the welfare spotlight focussing on recreational fishing and thought that it would be very useful get in ahead of the spotlight and examine the understanding and practices of the recreational fishing community on issues of fish welfare.

We wanted to see if there were ways to improve this understanding and practices, if such change was needed. We knew that there could be benefits to doing this. As a start, catching a fish

quickly and killing it immediately is good welfare. It is also good for the eating properties of the fish. Likewise, knowing how to minimise any unnecessary suffering we may cause to a fish we want to release is good welfare, as it gives the fish a much better chance of surviving.

Our project focused on two high profile fishing competitions and a number of charter boat operations around Australia. What we found was that in general, people fishing recreationally want to do the best thing by the fish. Sometimes though, they don't know how to do this, and sometimes were doing things unintentionally that were detrimental to the fish and to the image of fishing.

What we found was that in general, people fishing recreationally want to do the best thing by the fish. Sometimes though, they don't know how to do this, and sometimes were doing things unintentionally that were detrimental to the fish and to the image of fishing.

For example, a fish brought onto the deck of a boat will die slowly if simply left to lie there. Death of the fish may take quite a while, particularly if the fish is large. It is quite normal for a fish to make numerous attempts to get themselves off the deck and back into the water. These attempts over time get weaker and weaker.

Likewise, holding a fish up for the photo after a long and arduous fight, forces the fish to hold its breath, at a time when its body is desperate for oxygen. The longer the fish is kept out of water, the greater are the physiological changes that are occurring in its body. If these changes are too great, the fish will have suffered too much internal damage to be able to survive once released.

Seeing fish treated in this way can get the attention of the community, particularly those in the community that regard fish as any other animal and deserving of our respect. Actions such as these can erode the positive social license the recreational fishing community currently has. And as we all know it only needs a few people to be doing what the rest of the community thinks is the wrong thing for there to be considerable impacts.

So a key finding of our project has been the need to provide scientifically backed information to the recreational fishing community on how to respect a fish and what constitutes good welfare. We also worked hard to get the message out in clear,

Continued...

Love your fishing...and respect the fish you catch (continued)

simple language. The good thing is that we are not talking about recreational anglers making any major or drastic changes to the way they are now fishing. With relatively little effort, substantial improvements can be made to minimise any unnecessary stress they may cause to the fish they catch and those we want to release.

I have been enjoying going out into the recreational fishing community and talking about these aspects of fish welfare and how we can better respect the fish we target. It has been really pleasing to see such attention shown to my presentations by the recreational fishing community, who obviously want to learn more about the wonderful animal that is a fish. It is also great to think that responsible anglers can positively strengthen the overall social acceptance of recreational fishing.

Panaquatic looks forward to doing further work on this issue, together with VRFish. In the short term, we plan to provide more specific, scientifically backed information on some of our more popular fish species. Information on snapper is already available by my website, www.panaquatic.com.

We also plan to keep helping recreational anglers learn more about how they can continue to improve the quality of the fish they are catching and ensure that they are indeed heroes of the kitchen when it comes to preparing the fish they caught. We have the luxury of being able to bring a fish of superb quality to the dinner table. It just needs a little extra care and effort. We also have the luxury of time as recreational anglers - we want to help ensure that you know how to best use that time when fishing to look after the fish you catch. Everyone, including the fish, will benefit.

I am also more than happy to hear from you if you have any questions or concerns about your fishing and what we have discussed here, or if you have other topics you'd like us to address.

Notes:

1. Riepe, C. and Arlinghaus, R. (2014) Explaining Anti-Angling Sentiments in the General Population of Germany: An Application of the Cognitive Hierarchy Model, *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal*, 19:4, 371-390



Paul Hardy-Smith, Veterinarian,
Panaquatic Health Solutions Pty Ltd

Fish welfare - some useful tips to help preserve our fish stocks

- Firstly, for fish being caught to be eaten, choose gear that helps get the fish in quickly.

The shorter the time from hooking to capture, the less physiological changes in the fish and the better it will be to eat.

- Kill any fish you want to eat immediately.

This only takes seconds and is so much better for the fish. There are two acceptable ways to kill the fish – by spiking it through the brain or by hitting it firmly on the head and stunning it. “Cutting the throat” of a fish will cause a fish to die, but slowly by bleeding it to death. Bleeding fish can help improve quality, so if you do want to bleed the fish, spike or stun it first and then bleed it. This will ensure it is brain dead, even though the heart will go on beating for long enough to bleed it.

- When fishing with bait, consider using circle hooks.

Circle hooks reduce the chance of “deep hooking” in many fish species.

- Watch air exposure.

How long a fish is out of the water has a huge impact on its subsequent well being. Fish out of water are holding their breaths. If you plan to release the fish, keep it in the water if that's possible and if it's not possible make sure its time out of the water is as short as possible.

- If you are fishing in deeper waters, stop fishing once you have caught what you need.

Realise that pulling a fish up from depth quickly can lead to damage caused by gases expanding inside the fish, including the swim bladder. This is known as barotrauma, and can affect fish being caught from depths as shallow as 11m. If you keep fishing, be aware that a proportion of the fish will likely not survive once released, no matter what you do.

- Try to minimise how much you handle the fish.

If you do have to handle it, do it gently remembering that the delicate outer layers of the skin of a fish sit on top of its scales. Make sure anything that may come in contact with the fish, for example a net or the deck of the boat, is wet, soft and cool.

- Avoid using knotted nets.

If you must use a net, use a knotless net or one of the newer silicon/rubber nets. They are much gentler on the fish.



Development of Resources to Promote Best Practice in the Humane Dispatch of Finfish

DIGSFISH
SERVICES

BK Diggles - DigsFish Services Pty Ltd, Banksia Beach QLD, AUSTRALIA - ben@digsfish.com

AUSTRALIAN
ANIMAL
WELFARE
STRATEGY



Introduction

Iki jime (also known as **ikejime**), is a Japanese method of brain spiking (pithing) that is the fastest and most humane way to kill fish.

Rapid dispatch of finfish using this method results in improved fish welfare outcomes, as well as improved flesh quality and the potential for extended shelf life.

We found that resources which demonstrate to fish harvesters accurate **how to** information on the iki jime procedure were non-existent.

Fish brains are small and vary in location between species groups. This information gap was considered a barrier to the widespread uptake of the iki jime method amongst groups such as recreational anglers and aquaculturists.

Methods

To fill this information gap we undertook morphological investigations using x-ray and dissection to pinpoint the brain location of over 80 species from 33 families of finfish most commonly cultured and targeted by fisheries throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Asia/Pacific region.

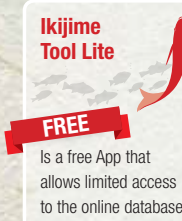
Brain locations were superimposed graphically on colour photographs of the exterior of each fish, and hard copy pamphlets containing this information were produced.

Website & Phone Apps

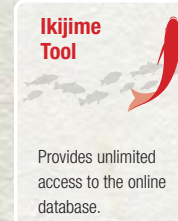
A new website www.ikijime.com was developed, with interactive photograph/ radiograph overlays revealing the brain location of each fish species placed on an online database.

Other extension tools arising from this project include development of the Ikijime Tool series of phone apps for Apple and Android phones.

Available at...



Is a free App that allows limited access to the online database.



Provides unlimited access to the online database.



Contains its own database and has full functionality in remote places out of phone or internet range.

Using the iki-jime Tool phone app: Easy as 1-2-3

1 Search

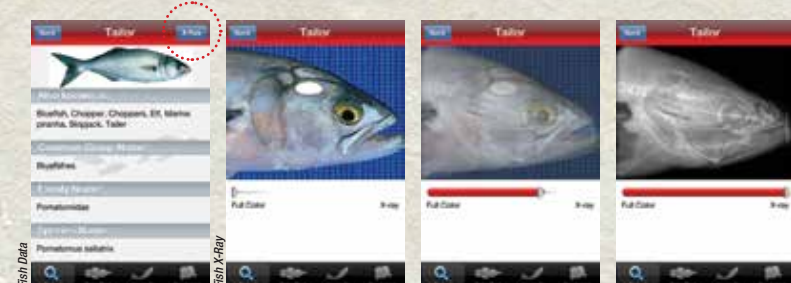
- Find your fish by using the default **Search Fish** page.
- Select the water you are in - **Freshwater, Estuary or Offshore**.
- Select the relevant fish name from the dropdown list and hit **Go Fish**.

Another way to search for your fish is to use the **Advanced Search** option, useful if you know the taxonomic group or scientific names of the fish you are catching or culturing.



2 Learn

- Once you hit **Go Fish**, the fish data page will appear with many fishy facts including alternative names, description, distribution, common and maximum sizes and more.
- After the fish data page appears, you can then hit the **X-Ray** button to use the slide tool that shows the brain location of your fish super-imposed as a white spot over easily recognised external landmarks.



3 DO

- Stick your brain spike into the spot, the fish is instantly and humanely killed.



Other features include a **Take Pics** function to photograph your fish for identification or bragging rights.



The **Brochures** page provides PDF brochures to print out and laminate.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy for funding the database upon which the website and phone apps are based. The website and phone apps were developed in-house by DigsFish Services.

Further reading

Diggles BK, Landos M (2012). Development of resources to promote best practice in the humane dispatch of finfish caught by recreational anglers. Australian Animal Welfare Strategy Project Number AW1011-08

DIGSFISH
SERVICES

BK Diggles - DigsFish Services Pty Ltd
Banksia Beach QLD, AUSTRALIA
ben@digsfish.com

Enhancing snapper welfare

by **FRANZ GRASSER**

In 2013 VRFish identified a need to roll out an information and education campaign to ensure that recreational fishers are aware of their impact on any snapper being released. The project is aimed at the recreational snapper fishery in Victoria and it is designed to provide fishers with information and education on how to help released snapper survive.

It uses best available science to inform anglers on how to help released snapper survive and enhancing snapper welfare is a core objective of the project.

VRFish is the project manager and obtained a grant from the Recreational Fishing Licence Grants Program to execute the project. Fisheries Victoria has provided valuable input to the project from their science, compliance and media areas. Paul Hardy-Smith an aquatic veterinarian of Panaquatic Health Solutions Pty Ltd provided invaluable input and assistance in the scientific analysis of relevant knowledge used in the project.

As it is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 people fish for snapper in Victoria during any given year, it is very challenging to come up with a program that targets and reaches such a large and diverse group of people at a reasonable cost.

For this reason the project uses a variety of media to inform and educate snapper fishers including advertisements in print media including Victorian Fishing Monthly, Fishing Lines, SE and SW Angler and Modern Fishing.

A DL brochure and a boat sticker have been printed and are being distributed through the VRFish networks, tackle stores and at the boat and fishing shows. A3 Posters and DL brochure holders have been supplied for professional point of sale display. The brochures will also be direct mailed to fishers on the VRFish data base. The project is also being promoted on the VRFish website and Facebook page as well as the Fisheries Victoria Facebook page.

McGlashan Media has been contracted to film the "how to" of snapper release techniques and this film will be released and publicised on YouTube. It is also expected to feature as a segment on the TV show "Small Boats Big Fish".

All of these methods of communication are focussed on informing anglers about 5 key points that are critical to helping released snapper survive. These five points are:

Five points to ensure snapper survival:

1. Fish shallow to avoid barotrauma

Snapper caught from depths greater than 11 metres can suffer from barotrauma even though there may be no external sign of injuries and the fish may swim off strongly. The message here is to cease fishing in depths of greater than 11 metres once you have caught what you need.

2. Leave snapper in the water for release

Air exposure is harmful to fish and should be avoided if possible. Reaching into the water to de-hook the fish is better than removing the fish from the water.

3. Minimise handling and netting

Avoid all handling of the fish if possible. De-hooking the fish without touching it helps it to survive.

4. Use circle hooks or lures

Use of circle hooks and lures on tight lines maximises the chance of a hook up in the fish's mouth. Avoiding the risk of deep hooking is critical to helping released snapper survive.

5. Release snapper quickly

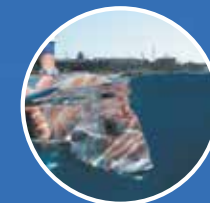
Catching and releasing the snapper quickly minimises the stresses on the fish and therefore maximises the chance for the released snapper to survive.

Snapper stocks in Victoria are in great shape with recruitment surveys showing above average recruitment for the past two seasons. Recreational fishers can help keep it that way in future by practicing the five points above to fish responsibly and sustainably.

Franz Grasser



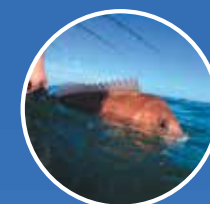
Help released snapper survive



Fish shallow water to avoid barotrauma



Leave snapper in the water for release



Minimise handling and netting



Use circle hooks or lures



Release snapper quickly

Snapper fishers can help the survival of released snapper by following these key points.

For further information on these points go to www.vrfish.com.au/snappersurvival

Representing
Victorian
Recreational
Fishers



This project was funded by the Victorian Government using Recreational Fishing Licence fees



VRFish Strategic Plan 2012–2017

Five Key Pillars

The VRFish Strategic vision is supported by five key pillars and is underpinned by our core values. VRFish is committed to producing the following outcomes:



VRFish Representing Your Interests

As the peak body representing a community of over 721,000 Victorians, VRFish works to provide fishers with support through facilitation, advocacy, education strategies and policy development. We consult broadly with the recreational fishing community to represent their views in an accurate and timely manner to Government and their agencies, as well as communicate effectively with the recreational fishers of Victoria.

VRFish Charter
...is to consult broadly with the recreational fishing community to represent the views of recreational fishers in an accurate and timely manner to Government and their agencies, as well as communicate effectively with the recreational fishers of Victoria.

VRFish Vision
...is to ensure full access to a diverse and healthy Victorian recreational fishery.

VRFish Mission
...is to represent and advocate the interests of the Victorian Recreational fishing community.



To keep or kiss and release

By JOHN WILLIS

Whether you catch and release, or keep as a feed for the family, it's important to treat fish with care and respect.

To most travelling nomads, the world is a far different place to when we were young. We are the post-war Baby Boomers of the 1950s and '60s, a time of great change in our communities and lifestyles. Attitudes have altered dramatically and environmental issues have replaced many of the blood-and-guts struggles of previous generations. The '60s hippy generation was the leading inspiration. It was a time when many developed a better perception of caring for our planet and those who live on it. The 'make love not war' era was a huge influence on many of us.

Shifting winds

Attitudes have changed toward hunting, fishing and animal welfare. In Australia, we have led the way with management tools such as quotas, licensing, bag limits, gun control and seasonal closures. And give Rex Hunt his due; he led us forward with the catch-and-release ethos by giving his fish a big kiss before setting them free. We have been forthright and, in many cases, we have led the world with our stocking and protection methods. We pump hard-earned money into stream restoration, fish ladders, artificial reefs, stocking programs and, yes, even that dreaded topic of marine parks, all to ensure fish will be available for our future generations. I would like to think that we will leave our children the same opportunities that our generation has enjoyed.

Sure, there has been good and bad. This is Australia, the land of fire, floods, toil and pain. There have been many challenges for our fish stocks, including overfishing from both recreational anglers

and commercials alike, pollution, development and environmental threats such as climate change (note that I didn't say 'global warming'). I reckon it's pretty simple: climates have changed since the world began. It's how much influence we humans have on the environment that's in question. We fishos constantly see changes, both short and long term, good and bad.

For example, the south-eastern states are currently experiencing an unprecedented explosion in the numbers of southern bluefin tuna and mahi mahi (commonly called dolphin fish) to our great delight. The bluefin have returned in great numbers after a long decline but, previously, mahi mahi were virtually unheard of in our waters.

There's lots of news around the country regarding our tremendous fish stocks. But with our ever-changing environment comes greater scrutiny and responsibility. Social media has changed our world. The fisher's grapevine has always been much more efficient than the jungle telegraph, but now social media tells us in real time where, when and how to fish. It is a terrific tool for our busy lifestyles and a wonderful source of local information for travelling fishos wanting to find the best opportunities in a new region.

Get media savvy

However, the net also has some bad sides. All of a sudden, those who disagree with our sport have constant access to images of dead fish as anglers proudly load the web with pictures of their latest catches and kills. We fishos need to be increasingly aware of our media presence. Irresponsible images of big fish kills cannot be tolerated. Don't get me wrong, I'm the first to stick up for our right, yes right, to kill a fish for the table, but we don't need to arm our detractors with images of bloody, injured fish.

Our catch and release, and our tagging programs, have served us well for decades, but we need to take it further. It's no use

putting an injured fish back in the water to die. Scientists such as Dr Ben Diggles, Dr Paul Hardy-Smith and Dr Julian Pepperell have done volumes of work on not only fish-handling techniques for greater survival after release, but how to humanely kill our table fish and maximise their eating qualities.

The Japanese led the way in handling and preparation for the massive sushi and sashimi market. They taught us many years ago that leaving a fish to flap around on the deck, or to lie slowly dying in a kill tank, releases adrenalin and other hormones into the system, thus diminishing the eating qualities.

They use a more humane method that involves spiking the brain, ike jime, an ideal method for those who know exactly where to

insert the spike. But it can serve an opposite purpose if not carried out correctly. A positive blow to the skull will stun a fish immediately. Follow this up by a spike to the brain, cutting the throat and for many species gutting immediately. The humanely killed fish should then be kept as cold as possible, preferably a few degrees above freezing. A slurry of 1:1 ice and saltwater is ideal and you will be amazed at how much better the fish will taste on the table.

Taking responsibility

Even before we get to the handling stage we can make some positive decisions about our fishing responsibilities. Professional fishermen have used 'circle' hooks for many years. These hooks rarely gut-hook a fish; instead, they are shaped to catch a fish in the corner of the jaw, thus greatly improving the mortality of released by-catch. We are also becoming increasingly aware of 'barotrauma', in which fish that are hauled from the depths are subject to damage from pressure changes. Every second a fish is out of the water for a photo will diminish its recovery prospects.

We also recognise that scales provide a protective layer and gills are very delicate organs for our fishy friends, and hence we need to take great care in our handling techniques for those little mates we let loose to catch another day.

It's about taking responsibility for our actions. We all love fishing but our latest tackle, technique and technology has made experts

of a much larger proportion of recreational fishos. Combine this with a greater number of anglers, more demands on our waterways and greater scrutiny from animal welfare groups and we need to increasingly fish smarter and more humanely. When we do have success, by all means keep a great feed for the table, but care for your catch for better culinary results. There's little point in releasing a salmon or tuna and then buying it in a can from the supermarket.

They use a more humane method that involves spiking the brain, ike jime, an ideal method for those who know exactly where to insert the spike. But it can serve an opposite purpose if not carried out correctly.

Learn how to take a good photograph and you will enjoy your success forever. An image of a happy face holding a beautiful fish will provide a lasting memory. An image of a happy face holding a beautiful fish just prior to a successful release feels even better – forever!



John Willis

Responsible release of a female gummy shark



In cod we trust

The Victorian fishing community have been proactively supporting and advocating for better management of Victoria's Murray cod, and in general, most welcome the changes as a positive step towards evidence-based management ...

by ROBERT LOATS

To put the following article in perspective it would be wise to reflect on the past values previous generations placed on catching the legendary Murray cod and what the current fishing community expectations are regarding future management associated with the new regulatory changes.

Rob, the "Codfather" Loats with a 15lb cod caught at his favourite location where he has been fishing since age 12



Perhaps I was born with Murray cod entrenched in my thoughts as both my grandfathers and father were experienced Murray cod fishers. In fact, I believe my father was one of the most patient anglers I have ever known. He only fished from the bank and would sit for hours at a time beside a fallen large snaggy redgum tree or a rocky ledge with his hollow steel rod with cork grips, centre pin reel spooled with heavy braided nylon line and two large hooks baited with yabbies or freshwater mussels in anticipation of hooking a cod or two. It was customary in those days to keep all fish legally caught and catches were always destined to be utilised for human consumption, either consumed while camping by the riverside or iced down and preserved for the trip home to be consumed by the family.

One of the major attractions associated with cod fishing was to also enjoy a friendly camp beside the mighty Murray or maybe the Edwards, Wakool or another favourite fishing river. The general talk while enjoying the tranquil surrounds beside a warm campfire following a day's fishing was always the dream of "hooking and landing the legendary big cod from the murky depths of the river" or as often occurred, to reminisce about the big one that got away following a bruising battle.

Over a time frame of approximately 52 years as a passionate cod fisher myself, it was always a passion or maybe a family tradition to land that "big one". Yes, I have achieved this on numerous occasions, but unlike my previous generations, I fish out of a boat utilising all the modern gear, sounders, a huge array of lures, bardi-grubs for bait, and like many others if targeting a large cod, the mobility of motor vehicles allows me to choose the best times or weather conditions to achieve my goals. It may be looking up the modern day internet to identify a rise coming down a river or maybe a hot weather spell with thundery conditions on the horizon. Both prime cod catching times.



What has changed over time? Certainly nothing when it comes to the aspirations of present day anglers. Anglers currently have every aspiration of catching a huge cod, but there has been a real change regarding the extra fishing pressure on the resource and most importantly many anglers have identified this and are now practicing "catch and release" of the larger fish and settling for a photo or two.

I have seen many different management and regulatory arrangements for this legendary iconic species come and go. Recently, the Victorian Government have announced the introduction of new arrangements, which include a slot limit of 50-70 cm and a reduced bag limit to 1 fish per day in rivers.

The Victorian fishing community have been proactively supporting and advocating for better management of Victoria's Murray cod, and in general, most welcome the changes as a positive step towards evidence-based management which will secure benefits for the population through protection of the larger, breeding adults.

These new management initiatives have the potential of providing outcomes that could meet the aspirations of modern day anglers, the chance to catch and release a large iconic Murray cod and to take a good quality table fish for consumption if desired.

Handling pointers for better cod welfare

At the dawn of new fisheries management practices for Murray cod in Victoria, the following cod handling practices and techniques can be used to support the effectiveness of the new cod management regime (due to come into effect at the opening of the cod season 1 December 2014). These practices will give released cod a better chance of survival as well as supporting the reproductive potential of adults.

- **Releasing the fish:** practice releasing the larger fish in the water, this will give an often stressed and exhausted fish a better chance of survival. Large cod can become stressed prior to landing, the quicker they are released the better
- **Netting the fish:** if you must net the larger fish, use one of the new large eco-friendly rubber knotless nets to prevent undue damage to the fish
- **Wet your hands:** before handling a fish as this will reduce the removal of a mucus coating that protect the fish from infection
- **Cut the line:** studies show that removal of hooks in deep-hooked fish are one of the main causes of death. Rather than try to remove hooks where deep hooking has occurred, cut the line close to the mouth. A quality released and living Murray cod has more value than the small cost of a hook
- **Fish friendly tackle:** the use of non-offset circle hooks rather than J hooks can significantly reduce chances of deep-hooking. Also using barbless hooks assists quick hook removal without damage to the fish
- **Support the body:** if you must take a quick photo, take extra care to support the body of the fish, such as holding the fish horizontally. Be very mindful every second the cod is out of the water its chances of survival following release is diminished significantly. Never-lift or suspend from the mouth a large cod as this can, and often will lead to damaged internal organs and ultimate death
- **Fish for the table:** realistically there is nothing wrong with taking a fish or two for consumption provided it is within the regulations. Dispatch all fish required for consumption quickly, humanely and ice down immediately

by GEOFF FISHER

VRFish State Council member and
President of the Game Fishing
Association of Victoria

Release is the name with big game too



Catch and release:
Riley Smith and his
black marlin

Catch and release fishing is an increasingly popular practice among many anglers. It is quite common for fishers with a strong conservation commitment to release fish that they could legally keep.

Compliance with bag and size limits and various fishing closures also means many anglers, by law, return fish they have caught to the water. Recent research has shown that most fish survive using current catch and release techniques with the main factors found to reduce survival being deep hooking and poor handling.

To maximise a fish's survival when practicing catch and release, it is important to follow a few simple rules.

Use methods and rigs that increase the frequency of mouth hooked fish (rather than gut hooked), for example:

- Target fish using artificial lures
- Choose non-offset circle hooks when using bait
- If the fish is hooked deeply, cut the line as close as possible to the fish's mouth rather than removing the hook
- Minimise the length of time the fish is out of the water
- Ideally unhook fish while it is still in the water
- Try to remove hooks and release fish as quickly as possible
- The use of needle-nosed pliers or hook retrieving devices can greatly reduce time spent unhooking
- Remove hooks from mouth-hooked fish
- Use fish-friendly landing nets with soft knotless mesh
- Avoid knotted landing nets which may damage the fish's scales, skin, eyes and fins
- If live wells are used, maintain good water quality by using flow through, aerated system
- Poorly designed live wells reduce fish survival

Other practices to help increase survival:

- Use suitable tackle for the species that you are targeting and minimise the time spent to land the fish
- Use barbless hooks or hooks with reduced barbs to make hook removal easier and minimise hook damage to the fish
- This can be achieved by squeezing barbs down with pliers, or filing down larger barbs
- Handle fish firmly and carefully. Avoid dropping fish onto the bottom of boats and other hard surfaces
- Use wet hands or wet gloves when handling fish to minimise damage to its skin
- A smooth, wet surface or vinyl covered foam is the most suitable surface to place fish on in order to remove hooks. Remember, many surfaces, especially metal, can become very hot in the sun
- Do not hold fish by the gills or the eyes
- Take care to revive fish upon release if they appear exhausted (struggling to hold themselves upright and/or unable to swim away)
- Gently hold or push the fish through the water so that it obtains a good flow of water over its gills. If there is any water current, hold the fish upright facing towards the current until it starts to show signs of recovery
- If you are going to take photos of your fish before release, support the fish properly



Fish havens – restoring
habitat in Kerang Lakes

Healthy environment = Healthy fish down the line

by MICHELLE WENNER

VRFish Senior Program and Partnership Manager

Fishers spend a lot of time out in and connecting with nature: studying the tides, currents, and weather, sailing on the winds, navigating by the sun and the stars...

Because of an understanding of, and appreciation for, the interconnections between the elements in nature, fishers have a deep understanding of the importance of a healthy environment and healthy aquatic ecosystems for the health and welfare of fish. Healthy habitat and environmental quality is one of the key welfare factors for many species of fish. And it is because of this understanding, that fishers have long been environmental stewards, championing for healthy water and habitat, and therefore healthy fish down the line.

Whether part of the fishing or wider community, we all have a part to play and need to work together to ensure fish welfare and healthy fish populations for future generations through a healthy environment and aquatic ecosystems. We can all have a positive impact on the health of aquatic ecosystems and on fish welfare and health through:

- **Protecting fish habitat** (e.g. such as not removing logs)
- **Good riparian management** to prevent erosion and sedimentation, including through native revegetation and fencing along waterways
- **Taking care to prevent water quality degradation**, pollution and contamination
- **Supporting connectivity between water bodies** (e.g. removal of barriers such as weirs and dams)
- **Volunteering for community groups**, such as Fishcare, Estuarywatch, Coastcare or Landcare

The fishing community cares passionately about environmental and fish health – and here is a snapshot of what Victoria's fishing community, together with VRFish, have been doing in this space to promote healthy ecosystems and healthy fish:

- **Advocating for fish habitat and playing an active role to ensure healthy habitat** across riverine, estuarine and marine ecosystems, including 'fish havens' in Kerang Lakes; restoration of shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay; rehabilitation of instream habitat across Victoria's rivers
- **Actively promoting and working to secure water quality and allocation**: actively exploring options to secure a long-term water allocation for Toolondo Lake; advocating for better riparian management and revegetation
- **Participating in projects to ensure water connectivity** (through removal of barriers) and improve water flows (such as construction of fish ways and fish ladders) to prevent isolation of fish populations and support breeding
- **Representation and membership on a number of advisory groups and steering committees**, such as the Fish Habitat Network (which supports fish health and welfare through improving fish habitat), water and catchment management forums
- **Forging strong and cooperative partnerships** with catchment and water management bodies, councils, government, research providers, and community groups



Anthony McGrath (right) at the 7th World Recreational Fishing Conference

From Port Fairy

Talking about fish welfare to peaceful animal rights protestors

to Brazil

ANTHONY McGRATH

...reflects on his recent journey from the Young Future Leader Program to attending the World Recreational Fishing Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

In September I was fortunate to attend the 7th World Recreational Fishing Conference in São Paulo, Brazil. I was among many Australians in attendance, all made possible thanks to a travel bursary from the Australian Government through their National Recreational Industry Development Strategy, Recfishing Research and FRDC.

My journey to Brazil started ten months earlier, at the 'South East Young Future Leaders in Recreational Fishing Course' held in Port Fairy. This invaluable opportunity, led by VRFish and RecFish SA, started me on a pathway to become more involved in issues affecting Recreational Fishing.

Travelling to the conference required an arduous 30 hours in transit. On the first day we were warned by the organisers to expect protestors from a group of 'Anarchist Vegans' who were opposing the conference due to it promoting the cruelty towards and mutilation of fish, for fun. In actual fact, what we were greeted with was a polite group of students who we engaged in conversation and discussed their views in a civilised manner. They offered some excellent arguments based on their experiences in Brazil, however when they learned of the work done globally by recreational anglers in more developed countries to improve and protect our fish stocks, they found their hard-line views on recreational angling to be fundamentally challenged.

Whilst I don't expect any of them will be going out to buy a fishing rod any time soon, having them hear about angler led projects to improve habitat, investigate and educate about safe catch and release methods, controlling pests, securing environmental flows and protecting areas from mining and logging through being organised and lobbying government, we had clearly left them thinking that they were – in a roundabout way – preaching to the converted. My favourite part of the whole interaction was seeing the faces of the event organisers when we invited the protestors in for tea and coffee to continue our peaceful discussion.

In a strange way the interaction with the protestors was a fantastic but unplanned ice breaker for conference attendees, with everyone

getting together and having open discussions about all the good work that recreational anglers do around the world to protect, promote and improve the environment specifically for its flow on effect to us, which is better fishing. It also set the scene that one of the biggest threats to recreational fishing globally is uninformed public opinion that fishing is a bad thing. This is something that every angler needs to be aware of, as opinion already exists and there is growing belief that anglers are destroying the environment. Whilst I'm sure not many people reading this article would identify with that belief, we all need to inform ourselves of the term 'social licence' and how it will affect us in the future if we aren't seen to be the good environmental citizens that we are. It's every angler's responsibility.

Throughout the conference we heard from the world's leading experts about a great number of different topics from tourist licences and barbless hooks, through to hardcore science regarding catch and release of fish suffering barotrauma and stocking hatchery reared fish into self-sustaining wild populations. As with any good conference the best conversations were often had during the thirty minute bus ride between the hotel and the conference venue, or the short walk to a local restaurant.

Over the four days at the conference I spent a considerable amount of time with the other young leaders and I feel confident in saying that the future of fishing representation is looking bright in Australia. Perhaps brighter than many other developed countries. We have some very talented, level headed people involved who have earned the respect of fisheries managers, scientists and experts from all over the world. This was evident by the many connections we made during the four days and invites received to visit other countries for VIP tours of best practice projects from the industry leaders.

On reflection, this trip provided me with invaluable knowledge relevant to the fishing issues I am dealing with, new lifelong friends and a network of recreational fishing professionals from all over the world who I feel that I can call on at any time for advice and assistance. I have acquired a lifetime of knowledge in less than a year and I now confident that I have a considerable amount to offer the recreational anglers of Victoria and Australia. None of this would have been possible if I didn't get involved with the Young Leaders Course last year, so I encourage all passionate young anglers wanting to make an improvement to get involved in these programs.

Representing
Victorian
Recreational
Fishers



MEMBER PROFILE

Samantha Snowden-Finch



Samantha Snowden-Finch is our VRFish member of this issue. Samantha has been heavily involved with VRFish since 2009 and recreational fishing her entire life.

Samantha is a former VRFish staff member who worked with VRFish for over 2 years in administration and events. She is well appreciated by the VRFish State Council.

After her employment with VRFish Samantha joined VRFish as a State Council Member as she understood the importance and positive impact her say could have. She wanted the opportunity to speak up and make a difference. A few months after joining as a State Council member Samantha put her hand up to be nominated for the Board. Samantha was elected to the Board in October 2011 where she has contributed to business and strategy planning, policy making and general Board business. Samantha enjoys being one of the more junior VRFish members, and while no longer the newest squid on the block, believes this provides a unique input to the growing and fluctuating changes within VRFish and the recreational fishing community.

Stepping down from the Board this year, Samantha hopes this allows more time to wet a line and looks forward to actively promoting VRFish and recreational fishing throughout her networks and to catch a snapper this season with the aid of the snapper survival guidelines.

Samantha comes from a recreational fishing background. Her grandfather owned and operated Neptune's Cave in McKinnon for many years and her family would carry many a rod when on holidays to Inverloch. She fondly recalls pulling all-nighters fishing from Cowes Pier over weekends during her teenage years, with a fish mad partner, aiming for seven gills and cursing the wind. Samantha grew up pier and land based bait fishing but enjoys all forms of land boat and estuary fishing – although she is yet to catch one on the fly.

Samantha is a firm believer in sustainable fishing and reducing the adverse impact to the environment and the fish while maintaining a healthy outdoors lifestyle that encourages fitness and family values. She feels that "any fin is possible if you don't trout yourself".

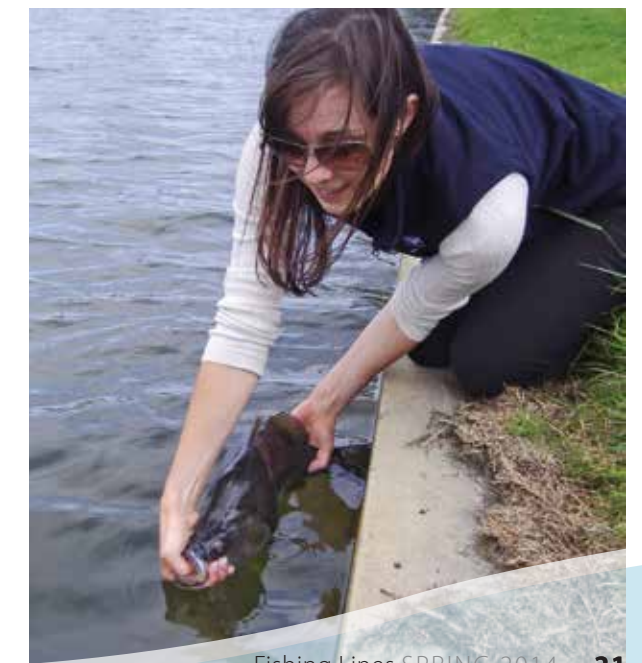
Samantha will be a familiar face with many of you who have visited the VRFish stand at any of the Boating and Fishing shows held in Melbourne each year. She thoroughly enjoys the chance to interact and discuss

recreational fishing concerns with the fishing community. She willingly volunteers to man the stand considering it a vital place for information sourcing.

Samantha enjoys the diversity of experience and culture within VRFish and believes that the organisation encourages and accepts those from all walks of life who have a considered input and passion in recreational fishing.

Albert Park Lake is one of Samantha's favourite metropolitan fishing spots due to the proximity to the city and the beautiful surrounds. She enjoys educating passer-by's as to the golden perch and carp species stocked within the lake and seeing the spark of interest in kids eyes as they contemplate catching their own big fish.

A true fisher at heart, Samantha bases her holidays on where to fish and can't imagine a life without fishing. She happily declares the breaking of zips on multiple handbags from salt corrosion as a worthwhile price to pay for the ability to get outside, in the fresh air and partake in a fantastic way of life.



Fishing in Victoria

– something
for everyone



Victorian fishers are a blessed lot – the fisheries across the State provide ample opportunities to ply your skill and feed your family.

Over 721,000 Victorians share a passion for recreational fishing, and there are fishing clubs scattered all over the State catering to fishers whether they be hooked on feeding ‘old man’ cod or like to chase the big reds as they come into our bays to spawn. There are many reasons a large segment of VRFish members belong to fishing clubs:

- > Fishing clubs give fishers access to a fantastic group of people who love to talk about fishing as much as they do.
- > They give a sense of contributing to the local community.
- > Club membership provides an opportunity to participate in social and competitive events.
- > They give the ability to improve fishing by learning from more experienced fishers or to share your own knowledge.
- > Club membership also provides a means to contribute to the political landscape of fishing, and have your say in issues that affect you and your favourite fisheries.

Contact one of our member clubs opposite for more information.

Representing
Victorian
Recreational
Fishers



Member directory

Albert Park Yachting & Angling Clubs Association

Contact: Patrick Hutchinson
Phone: 03 9329 8200
Email: info@apyac.org.au
Web: apyac.org.au

Association of Geelong & District Angling Clubs

Contact: John Hotchin
Phone: 03 52486817
Email: jhotchin@bigpond.net.au
Web: fishinggeelong.com

Australian Anglers Association (VIC)

Contact: Tim Hose
Phone: 0428 521 449
Web: aaavic.org

Australian National Sportfishing Association (VIC)

Contact: Darren Wloch
Phone: 0414 383 477
Email: dwloch@borcor.com.au
Web: ansavic.com.au

Ballarat & District Anglers Association

Contact: Geoff Cramer
Phone: 0418 320 139
Email: gcramer@chw.net.au

Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron

Contact: Brian Wright
Phone: 0421 764 370
Email: bwgarden@optusnet.com.au
Web: bmys.com.au



Boating Victoria

Contact: Wallace Nicholson
Phone: 03 9585 1330
Email: boating@yachtingvictoria.com.au
Web: boatingvictoria.com.au

Council of Victorian Fly Fishing Clubs

Contact: Doug Braham
Phone: 03 5174 4606
Email: ddbraham@bigpond.com

Fishcare Victoria

Contact: Dave Cleeland
Phone: 0468 300 588
Email: dcleeland@fishcarevictoria.org.au
Web: fishcare.org.au

Game Fishing Association of Victoria

Contact: Geoff Fisher
Phone: 0412 005 850
Email: secretary@gfav.com.au
Web: gfav.com.au

Gippsland Angling Clubs Association

Contact: Robert Caune
Phone: 03 5155 1505
Email: robert@net-tech.com.au

Goulburn Valley Association of Angling Clubs

Contact: Wally Cubbin
Phone: 0428 942 744
Email: wcubbin@bigpond.net.au

Howqua Angling Clubs Fish Protection Association

Contact: Steven Relf
Phone: 0417 553 249
Email: srelf@optusnet.com.au

Metropolitan Anglers Association

Contact: William Richards
Phone: 03 9337 5113
Email: fishomaa@hotmail.com

Midland & North Central Angling Association

Contact: Greg Hellsten
Phone: 0401 984 323
Email: greg.hogp@hotmail.com

Mid Northern Association of Angling Clubs

Contact: Alan Digby
Phone: 03 5492 2822
Email: alasue@hotmail.com

Native Fish Australia

Contact: Tim Curmi
Phone: 0417 419 765
Email: timbo42b@yahoo.com.au
Web: nativefish.asn.au

North East Angling Association

Contact: Stafford Simpson
Phone: 0419 564 319
Email: vk2ast@tpg.com.au

Scuba Divers Federation of Victoria

Contact: Priya Cardinaletti
Phone: 0414 310 727
Email: priya@sdfv.org.au
Web: sdfv.org.au

South Gippsland Angling Clubs Association

Contact: Allister Dowling
Phone: 0429 001 984
Email: Jodie_dowling@bigpond.com

South West District

Association of Angling Clubs
Contact: Gary Cronin
Phone: 0417 125 127
Email: gbear@hotmail.com

Southern Freedivers

Contact: Clint Engel
Phone: 0409 613 804
Email: info@brimbosports.com
Web: southernfreedivers.org.au

Torquay Angling Club

Contact: Steve Burton
Phone: 0412 101 225
Email: fishing@torquayfish.com.au
Web: www.torquayfish.com.au

Victorian Fishing Charters Association

Contact: John Willis
Phone: 0407 053 484
Email: john@beachmarine.com.au

Victorian Piscatorial Council

Contact: Peter Milley
Phone: 0419 537 082
Email: pmilley@bigpond.net.au

Wimmera Anglers Association

Contact: Barry Williams
Phone: 0402 352 006
Email: barry3422@bigpond.net.au



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