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DRAFT REPORT - YARRA RECREATIONAL PADDLING LAUNCH INVESTIGATION

Dear Dan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the draft report. VRFish, is the peak body representing recreational fishing Victoria's 838,000-strong recreational fishing community

VRFish supports infrastructure that is inclusive, facilitates the pursuit of recreation and connection with the outdoors, and which offers a holistic opportunity for users of all skill levels, ability and socio-economic background to participate.

From the outset we are perplexed why the study has been commissioned to enhance recreational boat launching on the Yarra River but has not considered the use of powered vessels.

VRFish's policy position strives for on-water access to all public waters, to all forms of recreational boating. Any infrastructure planning processes must therefore reflect this policy to meet the diverse needs of Victorian recreational fishers.

A recent survey VRFish of recreational fishers found that the highest priority for recreational boat fishers in the greater Melbourne and Port Phillip area is boating infrastructure. There are many management options available to suit the specific waterway and to accommodate other water users, such as mandating electric motors only.

Let's make fishing better, for everyone.

The report's scope is also out of step with work and future plans on the Maribryngong River. VRFish has been advocating strongly for new boat launching and the Boating Industry Association of Victoria (BIAV) has completed a feasibility study. The Victorian Fisheries Authority are also planning a native fish revival project involving habitat restoration and fish stocking and is predicated on increased access to the river. There are tremendous opportunities to take a similar approach on the Yarra River.

The report scope also eludes recreational paddlers contribute more to a 'liveability' index compared to recreational boating. We argue strongly that recreational fishing via boating also makes a strong contribution to liveability ratings and is entirely compatible with Melbourne Water's vision statement of enhancing life and liveability. Various studies (McManus et al. 2011¹, Hunt and McManus 2016²) reveal considerable evidence that encouraging young children, youth, adults and family to fish would offer a healthful form of outdoor recreation that could be enjoyed throughout life.

Powered boating with 5 knot speed restriction is permitted on the Yarra River up to Johnston Street Bridge. Currently, there is no launching facilities for powered trailer boats on the Yarra River. The closest facilities is The Warmies, adjacent to the mouth of the river. Currently, it can take up to 30 – 45 minutes travel time to reach areas considered fishable. These fishers need to navigate past one of Australia's busiest shipping port to reach fishing spots in the lower Yarra reaches.

Any plan should accommodate for the future and growing needs of the recreational fishing community. The popularity of freshwater fishing for native fish is growing in popularity through stocking programs and improved habitat, water quality and flows. Despite a 'powered boating restriction' upstream of Johnston Street Bridge, social and economic benefits provided by recreational fishers using powered vessels can be a driver for change particularly in relation to the Victorian Government's *Target One Million* policy to get more people fishing, more often. Also, the recreational fishing sector evolves quickly in response to new technology. Kayaks are now being fitted with electric motors and motored Stand Up Paddleboards (SUPs) are next on the horizon.

Increased uptake of paddle sports has also been witnessed in the recreational fishing sector in Victoria as a method of easy access to fishing opportunities, particularly given increased competition and congestion at existing boat launching facilities. Any planning to accommodate and increase participation of 'Yak Fishing' is commended. We foresee participation of fishing using kayaks to continue to increase across both

estuarine and freshwater areas of the Yarra River. These fishers will require suitable standard launching infrastructure, including car parking in close proximity and hardened pathways to wheel their vessel.

Any new or upgraded infrastructure must be multiple use and accommodate land-based fishers. These fishers will also utilise jetties and ramps, and value increased access and other amenities particularly where adjacent areas of steep banks or vegetation prevents access. Therefore, it is important to plan for shore-based fishing to manage and mitigate conflict with paddle user and ensure the sites maximises the 'liveability' index and contributes to Melbourne Water's vision statement of enhancing life and liveability.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Loats', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rob Loats
Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

4 April 2018

1. McManus A, Hunt W, Storey J, White J. *Identifying the Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Recreational Fishing* [Internet]. Report No.: 17122011. Perth (AUST): Curtin University Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute Centre of Excellence Science, Seafood and Health; 2011 [cited 2015 May 15]. Available from: <http://cessh.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/RecFishinglr.pdf>
2. Hunt, W. and McManus, A. (2016), *Recreational fishing supports health and wellbeing in Western Australia*. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 40: 292-292. doi:[10.1111/1753-6405.12490](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12490)