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Manningham Council
By email: Stephanie.Langton@manningham.vic.gov.au

WESTERFOLDS PADDLE SPORTS PLAN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Dear Stephanie,

Thank you for bringing this consultation to our attention and for engaging VRFish, as the peak body representing recreational fishing Victoria's 838,000-strong recreational fishing community, to provide feedback on the concept plan for Westerfolds Park.

VRFish is supportive of projects which 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.

Overall, VRFish is confident the concept plan for Westerfolds Park will offer improved opportunities to those that undertake paddle sports. VRFish believes that the plan has the potential to deliver enhanced outcomes and benefits under a more integrated approach which is inclusive of other user groups. VRFish therefore would like to recommend more meaningful inclusion of other key user groups, such as recreational fishers, to ensure that the best possible outcomes are delivered from the plan that stand the test of time and the evolving needs of the community and recreational user groups.

Background information

Victoria's recreational fishing community predominantly resides and pursues fishing within the Port Phillip region. Under the Victorian Government's *Target One Million* plan to grow the number of recreational fishers, this trend is likely to increase given that a large proportion of the growth is occurring in urban areas and population centers with high density, such as Melbourne and Port Phillip. 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.

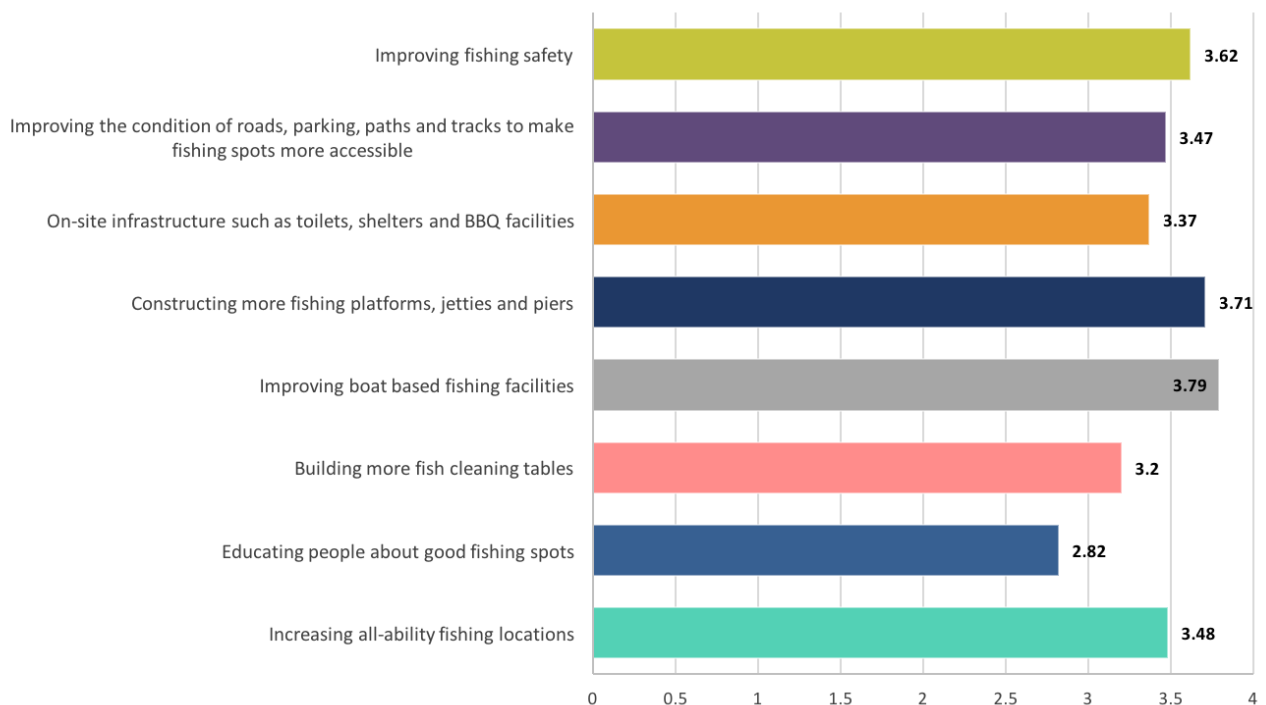
VRFish recently conducted a survey of recreational fishers to gather information on priorities and needs for improving recreational fishing opportunities in Victoria. The survey

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results have been analysed to reveal a number of findings of particular relevance to this consultation:

- The largest proportion of Victorian fishers fish within the Port Phillip region.
- Of those that fish in Port Phillip, just over one third fish in inland waters and rivers (as opposed to estuarine and marine waters).
- Of the fishers that mainly fish in inland waters, approximately 21% undertake land-based fishing only (25% fish from a boat, 54% fish both boat and land-based).
- Fishers are predominantly motivated to fish based on experience-based rather than catch-based motivations. “To be outdoors”, “to relax” and “to be with friends and family” were the most cited motivations for pursuing recreational fishing.
- In terms of priorities for investment to improve the recreational fishing experience, “improving fishing facilities” was rated as the number one priority for 19.3% of respondents who fish inland in Port Phillip.
- Respondents were asked to identify in more detail their specific infrastructure needs, which revealed (for those fishing inland waters in Port Phillip) that improving boat-based fishing facilities, constructing more fishing platforms, and improving fishing safety were the top 3 actions for improving fishing facilities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Priority actions for improving accessibility of fishing opportunities (mean)



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In addition to an analysis of survey results, local members and fishing associations have been consulted in putting together our comments on the concept plan, and also to ground-truth the survey results. Feedback has identified Westerfolds Park (and adjacent side of river, which includes Griffiths Park) as attractive fishing spots where native fish (Murray cod and Macquarie Perch) can be caught, in addition to carp. It was also highlighted that fishers have trouble with access in the area given steep banks and vegetation. This, together with competition for access to the river, makes fishing from areas that have been cleared (such as boat launches) attractive.

Recommendations

Improved access and facilities is a critical element for supporting growth of the recreational fishing community and equitable access to opportunities. This is particularly important given increased competition for access under the Government's growth targets.

It is therefore important that any planning or decision-making process which has the potential to impact on recreational fishing integrate recreational fisher user needs and facilities and access requirements. This is important not only to accommodate the growing needs of a growing and changing recreational fishing community, but also to mitigate and ameliorate any potential conflict with other user groups.

Given the growth of the fishing community, the concentration of fishers and fishing activity in Port Phillip Region, and increased access to fishing opportunities from paddle boats, VRFish would consider itself a key stakeholder in the development of the plan. VRFish would therefore like to propose the following:

- Potential to include VRFish as a partner on the project steering committee (or equivalent) to ensure stakeholder needs are fully integrated, any future planning is inclusive and responsive to all user needs (important given ongoing potential for conflict) and the best outcomes are delivered for all users under the plan;
- Expanding the scope of the plan to include improving access for the recreational fishing community; and
- New and improved facilities be designed to ensure access for all-abilities (including accessible fishing area, path along river away from/adjacent to bike path, easy-to-navigate path from carpark), promote participation by females and families (signage of fish and habitat within the river and appropriate toilet/ changing facilities), suitable lighting and safety infrastructure and rubbish disposal facilities which promote proper disposal of fishing line, bait and tackle (e.g. "Seal the Loop" bins).

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We welcome contact by yourselves or any of the project partners to discuss our submission or any other considerations moving forward with the concept plan.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Loats
Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

5 April 2018

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