

Victorian Fisheries Authority
By email: improving.fishing@vfa.vic.gov.au

REVOLUTIONISING INLAND FISH PRODUCTION AND STOCKING IN VICTORIA

VRFish would like to thank the Victorian Fisheries Authority and the Snobs Creek Advisory Board for formulating their vision for safeguarding and growing Victoria's freshwater fishing opportunities. VRFish is confident that *Revolutionising Inland Fish Production and Stocking in Victoria* ("the Plan") is a positive step towards strategic stocking of our inland fisheries and sustaining better fishing opportunities for all Victorian fishers.

Recreational fishers are thrilled the *Target One Million* policy has been able to deliver over 6 million stocked fish last year to build and revolutionise our freshwater fishing opportunities, including creating a new native fishery at Rocklands Reservoir.

This welcome boost has also identified to the need to reflect on our infrastructure, processes, funding and ensure the necessary plans are in place to ensure Victoria's fish stocking program continues to produce tremendous value for all Victorian recreational fishers well into the future.

VRFish would like to suggest, that with a number of revisions and greater detail, the Plan could go on to deliver a range of fish production and stocking outcomes that will build better recreational fisheries.

In general, VRFish makes the following observations and suggestions for improvement:

Comments on Key Priorities

1. Safeguard the supply of stocked fish

VRFish believes it is essential that Victoria establishes a new purpose-built freshwater native fish hatchery in Northern Victoria. The Snobs Creek Hatchery is an ageing facility and was never established to service the fish production needs for native fish. The popularity of native freshwater fishing continues to accelerate and deliver economic and social benefits to regional Victoria.

With approximately 4 million native fish fingerlings purchased from commercial hatcheries mainly in NSW our security of supply is at risk. VRFish is deeply concerned that these fish hatcheries are exposed to market demands and even foreign ownership and will not take

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better, for everyone.**

into consideration needs of recreational fisheries. VRFish recommends that the VFA undertakes a business case for a new native fish hatchery post haste.

The Snobs Creek Hatchery is fundamental to the production of salmonids and its infrastructure should be sufficiently maintained and upgraded. Trout remain the most popular inland fishery and a new native fish hatchery will allow for increased production of salmonids at Snobs Creek.

2. Recover threatened fish species

With a resurgence in the popularity of freshwater native fishing led by Murray cod and golden perch, recreational fishers are requesting expanded stocking programs for blackfish, Macquarie perch, eel-tail catfish, silver perch and trout cod. These stocking programs should be informed by a Recovery Plan as detailed in the Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan and its objectives should be clear. If recreational fishing licence fees are used, our expectation is fishers should be able to fish for these species and have agreed clear targets set as to when a fishery will re-open to fishing or extractive fishing take place.

3. Grow More Fish and Create More Fishing Opportunities

To create and service a diverse range of fishing opportunities requires both an increased production of fish and a reliability of supply. Stocking goals in the Plan outline either 'mega' or 'trophy' fisheries. It is likely the limited supply of fish has restricted the development of many of our fisheries, particularly in large reservoirs.

Again, the Draft Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan when it reaches the implementation phase should specify the type of fishing experience across each waterway which will then in turn inform the stocking program. Through consultation with fishers, the Victorian Fisheries Authority should define the fishing experience and satisfaction goals for each waterway (i.e. create a trophy trout fishery or create a mixed native fishery) so that fishers both accept and support stocking rates and species.

There are terrific opportunities to develop additional niche fisheries similar to what has been created for Chinook salmon at Lake Purrumbete and Lake Bullen Merri. VRFish has proven there is demand and excitement for tiger trout to be added to the stocking program and the potential for a viable brook trout fishery has yet to be realised.

Urban family fishing lakes for rainbow trout has been extremely successful as an initiative to get more children and families fishing close to home, appeal to fishers that are time poor and offer low cost and accessible fishing opportunities. The popularity of native freshwater fishing has created a demand for quality fishing opportunities close to urban centres and it's been terrific to see silver perch added lakes in the north west. We agree that more native species should be introduced to family fishing lakes, similar to Albert Park Lake to cater for the demand for mixed native fisheries.

Fishing access still remains a major hurdle. There are many waters closed to fishing, restrictions on fishing to designated areas or prohibition of on-water access. To maximise the benefits of increased fish production, VRFish is advocating for a fishing access program to protect access to our fishing locations, gain access to closed areas and address conflict with other users. In urban areas, works to underpin water quality and minimise conflict with other water and land users is imperative.

4. Smarter Stocking

It is critical fish stocking programs are evaluated against the management objectives and its effectiveness towards meeting the needs and aspirations of recreational fishers. These evaluation tools need to be developed and would be particularly useful to track the performance and rate of stocking required. To this point, the Victorian Fisheries Authority will need to allocate the necessary research capacity and resources to develop survey methodology, including the viability of using citizen science data. Also, the VFA should be investing in research and procedures to distinguish between hatchery raised and wild fish.

5. Recreational Fisher Engagement

VRFish believes the input of recreational fishers, including many from our member organisations, has been integral to the quality of our stocked freshwater fisheries thus far. There are many engagement tools that can be utilised and developed to ensure that more recreational fishers can contribute their local knowledge and experiences towards future stocking programs. VRFish would recommend maintaining face to face engagement opportunities.

General Comments

- **Stocking targets**

VRFish welcomes the ambitious quantities of fish outlined in the stocking goals over the next decade. The VFA is advised to ensure it has the necessary capabilities and investment in research and development to meet these targets particularly for difficult to rear species such as catfish and Macquarie perch. For blackfish, an understanding of genetic strains and undescribed species should take place before any large-scale stocking programs. To inform stocking rates the Plan should invest in research and development to establish carrying capacity of waterbodies, particularly large reservoirs or 'mega fisheries'.

- **Estuarine and Marine fish stocking**

Without a hatchery in Victoria to service production and stocking needs for estuarine and marine fish, Victoria will still need to purchase 700,000 Australian bass and estuary perch from NSW. Additionally, this limits our capacity within Victoria to develop an ongoing marine fish stocking programs for species, such as black bream, dusky flathead, sand flathead, mulloway and prawns. This Plan could still be an opportunity to consider Victoria's complete fish stocking program. Without inclusion, our marine stocking appears to be in limbo without any strategic direction.

- **Funding**

The current and future fish production and stocking costs and funding sources should be described within the Plan and what aspects recreational fishers are being asked to fund through their licence fees.

- **Water security and climate change**

Stocking programs will be dependent on water quality and availability. There is a direct connection with the *Water for Victoria* Plan which should be noted. The Plan should articulate how it will respond during drying trends and have the capacity to increase production during wet times. We note that the Plan seeks to create 5 trout trophy fisheries that are drought proof.

- **Complementary actions are required to underpin successful stocking programs**

A number of strategies outlined in the Draft Freshwater Fisheries Management Plan need to be undertaken to secure the greatest benefit and return on investment from fish production and stocking not limited to, fish screens, removal of fish barriers need to be installed on irrigation offtakes, pumps and water diversions, habitat restoration and riparian rehabilitation and improved access.

- **Possible coordination with NSW and South Australia**

Native freshwater fish can migrate large distances and the Plan should consider a whether a coordinated stocking approach with other States may be beneficial.

VRFish invites contact if you like to discuss our submission further.

Kind regards,



Steven Relf
Deputy Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

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