

Hon. Jaala Pulford
Minister for Fishing and Boating
By email: jaala.pulford@parliament.vic.gov.au

SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE RELAXING OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO FISHING AND BOATING

Dear Minister,

The Covid-19 viral pandemic is an unprecedented event in our generation, and everyone is being asked to make sacrifices in our daily lives in order to save the lives of Victorians and protect our health system. We fully support the precautionary principle which has been applied to make all Victorians safer.

As the peak body for recreational fishing our position has been to encourage fishers to be responsible, play their part and work with the Victorian and Federal Governments to prevent the spread of this deadly and high contagious virus. We applaud our fellow recreational fishers for sacrificing their love of fishing whether they agreed or disagreed with the medical advice and restrictions. The Victorian Government is delivering extraordinary levels of investment and support for fishing and boating so we are confident these decisions have not been taken lightly.

VRFish is buoyed with the success of 'flattening the curve' and are very encouraged to hear that discussions are occurring to safely relax some Covid-19 restrictions. It is time to apply adaptive management to restrictions to replace the precautionary principle and pave the way to a new normal. We see this an appropriate reward for recreational fishers who have done the right thing.

Understandingly, VRFish have been swamped with a range of strong opinions from recreational fishers surrounding the ban of fishing and boating during Stage 3 restrictions and ask us to advocate on their behalf.

There has been much frustration expressed to VRFish that other Australian states are open to fishing, that social distancing can be achieved in fishing and fishing is a preferred method for many to keep active and is positive for mental health. Conversely, some fishers have complained to VRFish that we, and other recreational fishers were, irresponsible for even suggesting fishing could occur during a time of a State of Emergency.

We believe we have now arrived at a sensible point in the pandemic response to plan for the resumption of fishing and boating without jeopardising the health of our fellow Victorians. There are many Victorians eager to go for a fish, when it's safe to do so. We are equally mindful of the many businesses and tens of thousands of jobs our sector supports.

***Let's make fishing
better, for everyone.***

During the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3 restrictions, VRFish received criticism for mixed messaging as we sought clarification from Government. Therefore, we recommend discussing and agreeing upon what fishing and boating looks like in the adaptive management phase so that it can be easily communicated and adopted by our fishers.

During the Stage 2 Restrictions, VRFish developed common sense advice for our fishers choosing to fish during this time, while encouraging others to stay home. This was developed in consultation with our colleagues at interstate peak bodies. We believe this could be the basis of discussion and review by the Chief Health Officer in conjunction with the Victorian Government approach.

The common sense advice at Stage 2 Restrictions, included:

- Fish in your local area
- Restrict the time spent away from home
- Fish only with members of your direct household
- Go directly to and from your fishing location to avoid unnecessary interactions with people
- Adhere to social distancing and public gathering guidelines and pay particular attention at piers, jetties, boat ramps
- If you are unable to maintain social distancing/adhere to public gatherings guidelines, go home
- Refrain from touching objects in highly accessed public areas
- Wash your hands before entering your house after fishing, or immediately on your return.

We recommend to the Victorian Government that these common sense fishing principles could be used as basis of discussions on relaxing restrictions.

As the further the flattening of the curve continues, we are observing an increase in frustration by some fishers. As a gesture of goodwill, we suggest that an extension to the expiry dates of fishing licenses and boat registrations/licenses could be applied.

We again reiterate our strong preference to work constructively with the Victorian Government on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and navigating a safe and common sense approach to the re-commencement of fishing and boating.

Yours sincerely,



Rob Loats
Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body
20 April 2020