

Travis Dowling
Chief Executive Officer
Victorian Fisheries Authority
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Dear Travis,

EMERGING SPIDER CRAB FISHERY IN PORT PHILLIP BAY

I am writing to you to propose a way forward for our emerging spider crab fishery in Port Phillip Bay and outline a plan to mitigate conflict with other user groups.

The emerging spider crab fishery demonstrates how quickly our sector can evolve when new opportunities arise. After two fishing 'seasons' it is clear to VRFish there will be ongoing and strong demand from recreational fishers to fish for spider crabs.

While we fully agree there is no fishery sustainability issues, there is additional work and consultation required to embed our spider crab fishery as a permanent fixture in our fishing calendar. We have been disappointed that our recreational fishers have been ostracised and vilified for accessing the fishery, despite high compliance rates and no sustainability issues.

Therefore, the most pressing need is to strike an acceptance with the community and encourage respectful co-existence with other user groups. VRFish seeks to demonstrate strong leadership for our sector and our people by putting forward a four-point plan to mitigate conflict and improve the overall fishing experience:

1. Establishing a Recreational Fisher and Diver Accord

We recommend that VRFish and diving groups reach a consensus on an agreement that respects recreational fishing of spider crabs from the Rye and Blairgowrie Piers as well as eco-tourism values from spider crab aggregations by the diving sector. We would see this consisting of a code of conduct that would be accepted and promoted across the two user groups.

VRFish, in conjunction with diving and eco-tourism group representatives develops a Code of Conduct via a Fisher and Diver Accord which describes mutual respect for both recreational fishing and eco-tourism values of spider crabs at Rye and Blairgowrie Piers (and other locations when the issue arises). The Code of Conduct will be promoted across all sectors with an interest in Spider Crab management.

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

2. Specific Bag Limit for Spider Crabs

Through the Recreational Fisher and Diver Accord establish a daily bag (take and possession) limit which reflects a 'fair and reasonable' level of take of spider crabs.

As you are aware, there can be a range of social and sustainability objectives setting bag limits. During consultation for the *Fisheries Regulation 2019*, VRFish received high support for a review all bag and size limits, in line with a changing attitude towards what is a 'fair and reasonable' days' take.

The current bag limit of 30 crabs per fisher per day is a default bag limit and has not been formulated specifically for spider crabs. Now that we are experiencing ongoing demand for spider crabs by recreational fishers we believe it's appropriate to set a 'fair and reasonable' daily bag limit specific for spider crabs.

VRFish is early in the process of running a survey with spider crab fishers to learn more about our fisher's values and motivations. In setting a bag limit we need to ensure our fishers are given the opportunity to catch enough for their needs, noting bag limits relate to each individual fishing. While that work continues, as a starting point a bag limit of 10 spider crabs appears reasonable as an individual daily limit.

There could be other advantages from a reduced bag limit, including more opportunities for more fishers to access the fishery from these piers where access is extremely limited.

Through the Fisher and Diver Accord, we will be seeking support from diving groups and representatives that they would not use any public consultation for spider crab bag limits to renew calls for spider crab fishing to be banned. Additionally, throughout the public consultation process it must be stressed by the Victorian Fisheries Authority that any proposed specific bag limit for spider crabs is not in response to fishery sustainability concerns.

3. Enhanced Signage for Spider Crab Season

To enhance community understanding, signage could be significantly improved by outlining the current fishing rules as well as a future code of conduct. Parks Victoria should be engaged to support this initiative and overall management.

4. Deployment of Waste Bins during the Spider Crab Season

Discarding of bait and other items has been identified as an ongoing issue and impacting the underwater amenity of divers. This issue can be mitigated with the provision of bins at key points along the piers. Bins would be deployed temporarily between May and June based on spider crab migrations and aggregations. Reducing the use of plastics involved in fishing and changing bait discarding behaviour would be included in the code of conduct and enacted through a '*Bin It, Divers Below*' campaign.

Having these strategies in place for the 2021 fishing season will go a long way to make our spider crab fishery better through agreed behaviours from all groups, including waste management and the establishment of an agreed take level that ensures an equitable share of resources.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Loats', written in a cursive style.

Rob Loats
Chair
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

21 July 2020