



Victorian Rock Lobster Committee (VRLC) Meeting #2 – 29 September 2022

Location: Zoom Meeting

Chairperson's Summary

This was the second meeting of the Victorian Rock Lobster Committee.

Key items discussed included:

- Rock lobster pots in Port Phillip Heads
- Vic Pot Design Project
- Draft Code of Conduct
- Victorian Government levies
- Revenue raising options
- Rope-less Gear Trial

Rock Lobster Pots in Port Phillip Heads

- The VRLC noted correspondence from Maritime Safety Victoria (MSV) to the VFA regarding the deployment of rock lobster pots in and around shipping channels, and in particular the Port Phillip Heads.
- The Committee confirmed that while industry did fish on either side of the channel it did not fish within the shipping channel.
- The VRLC noted that losing any commercial fishing equipment due to an entanglement with a pilot boat is counterproductive to industry as the cost to replace the equipment, plus the lost product in the pot is very expensive.
- The committee discussed a range of potential solutions that would further mitigate any real or perceived risk of entanglement between a pilot boat and rock lobster fishing equipment, including the option to implement a navigation system alert outlining where rock lobster pots may be located in the no anchor zone
- The VRLC agreed to write to the VFA outlining where fishing does occur and reaffirming industries commitment to safe fishing practices. It will also communicate with industry to ensure that no fishing is being done within the shipping channel.

Vic Pot Design Project

- The VRLC was informed that the Vic pot project was currently on hold and that further updates will be provided at a later stage.

Draft Code of Conduct

- The VRLC discussed the draft Code of Conduct which has been developed by the Victorian Southern Rock Lobster Fishery to outline best practice for the commercial sector.
- The VRLC endorsed the draft Code of Conduct, especially its use in demonstrating to the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) that the rock lobster industry takes whale entanglements very seriously and is making every effort to mitigate the risk of whale entanglements.

- The VRLC agreed that a second and final round of consultation with licence holders on the draft Code of Conduct should commence, with a view to finalising the Code ready for distribution on 1 December 2022, in time for the peak fishing period.
- The VRLC confirmed expenditure from its \$80,000 fund to design and print hard copies of the Code of Conduct for distribution to industry at port meetings. A digital copy of the Code of Conduct will also be emailed to licence holders, the VFA and DELWP, and that the Code would also be published on the SIV website

Victorian Government levies

- The VRLC noted that industry members have been in contact with SIV to raise their concerns on the viability of their business given the cost recovery levies imposed on them by the Victorian Government.
- SIV I/CEO provided the committee with an update following its meeting with Minister Kilkeny on Victoria's cost recovery system, with SIV seeking support to implement appropriate processes/infrastructures to enable the current prospective cost recovery system to work properly, including the ability to conduct checks and balances of project or program delivery by the VFA.
- The VRLC noted that the Victorian Government did not waive or reduce any of the levies imposed by the VFA on the commercial fishing industry during the covid-19 pandemic or the closure of the Chinese export market.
- The VRLC noted that SIV has specifically asked the Victorian Government to support a range of measures that would lead to a reduction in levies payable by RL licence holders such as the implementation of a new licensing and quota management system that would enable real time quota trading, increasing efficiencies at the VFA, resulting in a reduction of admin staff, resulting in a corresponding reduction in cost recovered levies to all fisheries.
- The VRLC agreed that there is not much more that SIV can do to support industry at this time and requested that the SIV CEO reply to any RL licence holder accordingly.

Revenue Raising Options

- The VRLC reaffirmed its decision from its first meeting that raising revenue to enable strong advocacy, professional/and/or legal advice as necessary and to implement improvements to the fishery was a high priority.
- The VRLC noted that while there was in-principal support for a voluntary levy to raise additional funds for the sector, there was consensus from licence holders that the VRLC would need to provide some tangible outcomes before another voluntary levy was introduced noting that a levy was already paid to SIV.
- The VRLC agreed that there are a number of licence holders that have been seriously financially impacted by market closures, the impacts of covid-19, the rising cost of fuel/interest rates, etc. which makes it very challenging to consult those licence holders about the proposed voluntary levy.
- The VRLC discussed the position of a part time Executive Officer that would provide the level of leadership, advocacy and support that the sector requires. Funds for the position would be taken from the grant, however the position would come under the SIV banner with the Executive Officer reporting to SIV.
- Committee members requested that the current VRLC Chair (Wayne Dredge) take on the EO position in the short-term to establish the framework for a longer term recruitment process.

Rope Less Gear Trial

The VRLC was provided with an update on the rope-less gear trial that is being conducted by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. In Tasmania. Further information will be provided to the committee at the conclusion of the trial.

Next meeting: 4 November 2022,

Wayne Dredge
VRLC Chair