



Victorian Rock Lobster Committee (VRLC) Meeting #10 – 22 February 2024

Location: Zoom Meeting

Chairperson's Summary

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

Key items discussed included:

- 2025 Trans-Tasman RL Conference Planning
- Management Plan feedback/fee relief
- Pot Design
- Draft Animal Care & Welfare Bill
- Strategic Planning Sessions
- Other Business
 - Support for Fishing Industry Labour Agreements (FILA)
 - Trade & Market Access

2025 Trans-Tasman RL Conference Planning

- SIV to host the 2025 conference with the VRLC to lead the organising committee with the assistance of event coordinators (Event Studio).
- Committee needs to narrow down on a theme for the conference and start building out ideas on how it can be expanded from the 2023 event held in Adelaide.
- Venue to be confirmed (Melbourne Exhibition Centre has expressed an interest).
- VRLC to reach out to potential sponsors to be part of the event.
- Potential for the VRLC to organise a small three-day regional tour for delegates post the conference. This could include locations such as San Remo, Apollo Bay and Warrnambool with 30 or 40 participants that pay to attend.

Management Plan Feedback/Fee Relief

- The following recommendations were made to the VFA following the latest management plan meeting.
 - The Management Plan reflects that in the event of a review of total TAC is triggered by levels of recreational take, any additional allowable catch be shared equitably between sectors in line with the harvest strategy.
 - Fee relief for the EZ being maintained for the life of the Management Plan, to allow ambitious rebuild strategy whilst supporting business viability for fishing families.
- Discussion around the potential increase in recreational catch with questions raised on where the additional catch will come from. Commercial sector has already taken a huge cut and cannot risk losing more.
- The committee discussed the VFA's request for industry to engage in voluntarily data collection, however with the TAC dropping there isn't much drive from licence holders to spend time, effort and money on data collection.
- Committee agreed that some monitoring of recruitment is required but it cannot afford to do that without putting financial pressure on licence holders.
- EZ are catching their quota easily this year compared to previous, so licence holders will be disgruntled about a lack of quota.

- EZ licence holders will accept a TAC of 21 tonne providing there is fee relief. Without it, they'll want the full 32 allowed under a 20-year rebuild strategy.
- While the committee supports the overall management plan, it cannot endorse it in its current form unless the recommendations it put forward are met.

Pot Design

- WA baton pots were trialled in SA as part of a research project and were found to increase catch efficiency of SRL. VRLC member Matt Harry trialled a baton pot on his vessel in Vic.
- Committee noted finding from trial conducted in Victoria.
 - Design of the baton pot was heavy to deploy and sinks slowly which makes deploying at specific locations from a moving boat difficult to execute.
 - The weight also makes it difficult to handle without mechanical assistance which most boats in Vic are not equipped with.
 - Design prone to damage when deployed over reef.
 - WA
- Committee noted that the research in SA compared fishing efficiency between wooden baton pots and pots constructed with stainless mesh. In Victoria the design typically includes nylon mesh to make the pots as dark as possible.

Draft Animal Care & Welfare Bill

- A new Animal Care and Protection Bill has been drafted by the Victorian Government and is currently open for public comment.
- Committee sought clarification on how the draft Bill relates to Rock Lobster in relation to the handling of live lobster, bulk transport, packaging and processing for export.
- The general understanding is that there's not going to be a lot of change in practice for commercial fishers.
- The Bill will acknowledge circumstances where legitimate, necessary activities involving animals are regulated under another legislation such as the Fisheries Act 1995.
- The new laws potentially have greater implications further down the supply chain (e.g. retailers/restaurants) in instances where lobster is not housed or euthanized appropriately.

Strategic Planning Sessions

- Opportunity to discuss and define the future direction and area of focus for the committee.
- Planning session to be held following the Resource Advisory Group meeting in Queenscliff.

Other Business

a) Support for Fishing Industry Labour Agreements (FILA)

- SIV seeking feedback from the VRLC on providing letters of support to licence holders wanting to obtain a Fishing Industry Labor agreement with the Department of Home Affairs that would enable that business to employ temporary overseas workers.
- Committee endorsed SIV providing such letters on the basis that industry continually has issues with reliably sourcing crew.
- Committee agreed that businesses should recruit skilled workers from Australia first but understood the difficulties in finding competent crew.

b) Trade & Market Access

- Concern was raised about whether the National Lobster Working Group administered by SIA's trade desk is undertaking enough advocacy.
- Committee agreed that industry needed to be reassured that its interests are being prioritised in relation to exporting product to China.

- Although positive steps have been made in the relationship with China, the issues around trade/market access needs to remain a priority for the committee, while also ensuring that local relationships are maintained.
- Committee needs to develop a core message that can be used if approached by media. This will be even more crucial when the bans are lifted.

Next meeting: April 2024

Wayne Dredge
VRLC Chair