



Chairperson's Summary

Victorian Rock Lobster Committee (VRLC) Meeting #11 – 23 April 2024

Location: Zoom Meeting

2024 Port Meetings – Main issues discussed

- Eastern Zone - Fee relief
 - Licence holders reported catch rates of around 0.4 - 0.5 of a kg/pot.
 - General support for a stock rebuild strategy, however concerns held about how fishers survive low TACs with fees and cost of business being so high.
 - The VFA announced that current fee relief would be continued for another year.
 - The VFA explained that approx. 2/3 of the fee relief package is achieved through reduced data collection/analysis, which is possible for a short time given the small size of the fishery, but not viable long term without jeopardising the understanding of fishery biomass.
 - The VFA provided guidelines for voluntary length measurements to assist with stock assessments. Industry provided feedback that the guidelines appeared reasonable.
 - The VRLC endorsed the proposed TAC for 2024/25 but not beyond, until ongoing fee relief for the Eastern Zone or appropriate cost recovery reform is confirmed.
- Western Zone - Continuing stock rebuild
 - Questions posed by industry members regarding justification for the rebuild target (28% of pre-fishing biomass) that requires TAC to be fixed for the life of the management plan (5 years).
 - The VFA explained that targets were set by the Rock Lobster Resource Advisory Group following a review of other fisheries within Australia and Internationally.
 - If stocks rebuild quickly over the next 5 years, there might be an option to increase TAC while still aligning to 20 year rebuild targets put forward by the RLRAAG.
- Accurate data collection for recreational fishing
 - Accurate catch data (commercial and recreational) is important to achieve robust fishery management.
 - Commercial fishers must report catch prior to the point of landing; however recreational fishers have a period of 7 days to report catch. This creates an opportunity for underreporting.
 - Recreational fishers might only be motivated to report catch within 7 days if they get checked by a Fisheries Officer at the point of landing.
 - Suggestion that recreational fishers should nominate their fishing days and report their catch before, or at the point of landing.
- Fisheries inspections
 - Concern amongst industry that overhandling of lobster during inspections can cause undue stress. Fisheries officers asked to take reasonable care.

Quota consolidation

- The VRLC are considering an appropriate position regarding concern from some licence holders that consolidation of quota and licences may have implications for contract fishers and owner/operators regarding fees, resource access and market access.

- The VRLC does not intend to take a position on the topic quota consolidation as SIV, under its mandate, must represent the interests of all license holders. The committee does endorse SIV seeking clarity from VFA regarding the Victorian Governments position on quota consolidation in order to give fishers, vessel owners and quota owners greater confidence in the management of ITQ in the fishery

Offshore Wind Announcement

- DCCEEW recently made an announcement declaring an area in the Southern Ocean as being suitable for offshore renewable energy. This is approximately 20% of the original area proposed. SIV's submission to DCCEEW was considered in that process.
- Whilst not a great deal of fishing has occurred in the declared area since 2011 (while the focus has been on 'red fish'), historically there was a lot of lobster caught there, therefore the area should be considered important to the fishery.
- SIV can engage with proponents to better understand the intended extent and design of wind farms. Avoiding disruption to commercial fishing remains a priority for SIV.

Limiting risk of abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG) spread

- Several SA based fishers holding Victorian licences are unhappy at the time taken for the VFA to determine it was ok to retrieve gear from Victorian waters.
- The VFA explained that the virus is now considered endemic in the region.
- SIV has supported research to determine whether fishing gear can in fact act as a vector for AVG so that any unnecessary closures to fishing activity can be avoided.

Oil & gas activity displacement compensation framework

- The VRLC received a response to its submission to the three offshore energy companies (TGS/CGG/ConocoPhillips) who presented their draft compensation framework to SIV.
- The VRLC maintains its position that temporary retirement of quota is the most appropriate compensation mechanism for Victorian fishers temporarily displaced from historical fishing grounds by oil & gas activity.
- Compelling operators to keep fishing to be eligible for compensation is not appropriate when the areas for viable fishing are limited.

Trade update

- The VRLC Chair and SIV CEO met with the CEO of the Australia China Business Council to discuss what support their organisation can offer the Victorian lobster industry.
- If/when China trade resumes, the lobster industry could benefit from ACBC's networks to try and stabilise that trade relationship.
- Key representatives of the lobster industry should be seeking to attend and support events that build relationships with key trade partners.

Committee membership

- The VRLC Rules allow for a maximum of eight industry representatives - five from the Western Zone and three from the Eastern Zone.
- Two individuals have expressed interest in taking up the two positions currently vacant, namely Callum McCarthy (WZ) and Ross Bromley (EZ). Both were endorsed by the committee.

VRLC Strategic Planning Day

- Scheduled for late June in Queenscliff.

Wayne Dredge

VRLC Chair