



## **Victorian Rock Lobster Committee (VRLC) Meeting #9 – 2 November 2023**

**Location: Zoom Meeting**

### **Chairperson's Summary**

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

Key items discussed included:

- Draft Rock Lobster Management Plan Consultation
- Seismic Survey Fishing Displacement Compensation
- Technology & Innovation Update
- Impacts of Seismic Surveying on Rock Lobster

### **Draft Rock Lobster Management Plan Consultation**

- The VFA released the full draft RL Management Plan 2023-2028 for 60-day public consultation (finishing Dec 10<sup>th</sup>).
- SIV to present a draft email communication and summary document to support licence holders understanding of the proposed harvest strategy which notes the following.
  - The Management Plan to be reviewed after the conclusion of the first 5-year plan despite a 20-year plan.
  - Mention ERL achieving MSC.
  - Attach WRL MSC cost/benefit analysis.
  - Encourage licence holders to make their own submission directly to the VFA.
- SIV & VRLC to provide a submission noting the following.
  - Annual fee relief in the EZ equivalent to that provided in 2023/24 either for the life of the MP, or until cost recovery reform is introduced.
  - Require clarity on gear types allowed by indigenous fishers.

### **Seismic Survey Fishing Displacement Compensation**

- CCG/TGS/ConocoPhillips met with SIV to explain that they want to present a single protocol for compensating licence holders for short term displacement during seismic activity.
- The framework is positioned off the NERA protocol developed in WA/NT, which requires licence holders to keep fishing elsewhere and then be compensated for any drop in catch or increased cost of business.
- Concern was raised by the committee that Victoria SRL is a very different fishery with a smaller coastline available to fish. Displaced lobster fishers forced to keep fishing to qualify for compensation in Vic will be in conflict with licence holders who already operate in those areas.
- Committee note that a better approach would be to have a retirement of quota to give stock in the area a rest from fishing and not place additional fishing pressures on other areas. This approach may offset some of the long-term stock damage assumed to be caused by seismic surveying.

### **Technology and Innovation Update**

- OceanWatch Australia secured funding for five active pot fishers to attend a conference in Canada which looked at new technologies including ropeless gear.

- Although there is a small risk of whale interaction in Victoria, ropeless gear is not feasible or appropriate and the greater opportunity lies in preventative actions through improved training, information sharing (maps/plotters), best practice fishing methods and gear loss reporting.
- The VRLC to on the forefront of gear innovation to assess what might be relevant to industry.

#### **Impacts of Seismic Surveying on Rock Lobster**

- Industry remains very concerned about the potential long-term impacts of seismic surveys to stock health.
- Committee questioned the need for geographical areas to be re-surveyed if they have already been done.
- There is an opportunity to identify common concerns with other peak bodies, fisheries (e.g. abalone) and sectors (e.g. recreational).
- Public support to protect the industry and natural environment would be required to compel Government to avoid impacts.
- There appears to be unknowns regarding impacts of seismic on lobster larvae and on populations in shallow coastline areas, which could be areas for future research.

#### **Next meeting:**

Wayne Dredge  
VRLC Chair