

# Situation report: Abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG) 2021

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>From</b>                    | Steve Campbell, Incident Controller                 |
| <b>To</b>                      | Graeme Cooke, Chief Veterinary Officer              |
| <b>Situation report number</b> | 13 (Updates in blue text)                           |
| <b>Operational period</b>      | 27 July 2021 — 20 August 2021                       |
| <b>Issued at</b>               | 20 August 2021, 1800 hrs                            |
| <b>Response to</b>             | Abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG), Victoria, 2021 |

## 1. Current response objectives

The current objectives of the response to this abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG) incident are:

- Ensure a safe operating environment.
- Implement controls to minimise the risk of further spread of AVG by non-natural vectors.
- Undertake surveillance to determine the extent of spread of AVG.
- Determine further appropriate response options using an evidence-based approach.
- Provide relevant information to stakeholders on a timely basis.

## 2. Key updates

- The Control Order was re-signed by the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) on 20 August 2021, with no changes having been made to the Control Area since 10 July 2021. Restrictions within the Control Area remain unchanged and unlikely to change until revoked.
- This response is planned to transition shortly to a joint Ag Vic and VFA project that will develop the long-term policy and management approach for AVG in Victoria.
- Between 27 July and 20 August further delimitating surveillance was undertaken prior to moving to a project phase. This surveillance occurred over 2 days (9/8 and 10/8) at Cape Bridgewater, Cape Nelson and Cape Grant.

## 3. Background

- A diver observed dead blacklip abalone (*Haliotis rubra*) with signs indicating possible AVG on 1 May 2021 off the coast of Cape Nelson, Portland, Victoria. Abalone were collected and Ag Vic immediately notified. Both AgriBio and the CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) confirmed the presence of AVG virus on 2 May 2021.
- AVG is a viral disease of wild and farmed abalone which affects the nervous system of abalone and results in curling of the foot, swelling of the mouth, weakness and death of abalone.
- The virus can spread through water from infected abalone or abalone product (offal, shells or mucus), fishing equipment including wetsuits, anchors, rock lobster pots and ropes, and via people who have come into contact with infected abalone or sea bottom habitat.
- Abalone (wild and cultured populations), ecosystems, fisheries and associated stakeholders can be impacted if mortality events occur.
- The AVG virus has no known or predicted effects on human health, including those who come into contact through consuming or touching abalone.

- AVG is considered an exotic disease of molluscs under the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994* (LDCA) and must be immediately notified.
- The Australian Aquatic Veterinary Emergency Response Plan (AQUAVETPLAN) has a nationally agreed disease strategy for AVG in farmed stock.

#### 4. Current situation

- Agriculture Victoria (Ag Vic) and the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) are working together to respond to the detection of AVG, with Ag Vic leading the response.
- [The Control Order was re-signed by the CVO on 20 August 2021, with no changes having been made to the Control Area since 10 July 2021.](#) Restrictions within the Control Area remain unchanged and unlikely to change until revoked.
- This response is planned to transition shortly to a joint Ag Vic and VFA project that will develop the long-term policy and management approach for AVG in Victoria.
- [Meetings with the farmed and commercial abalone dive industries were held on 18 August, with actions identified for each of the groups.](#)
- [A national AVG decontamination technical working group meeting was held on 20 August with representatives from all the states, federal government and the commercial catch industry. The aim of the working group is to develop consistent national biosecurity and decontamination protocols. The group will also identify gaps in knowledge in this area that require further research.](#)
- The Chief Executive Officer of the VFA gazetted a Fisheries Notice under Sections 67, 114 and 152 of the *Fisheries Act 1995*. The Fisheries (Abalone Disease Closure No.3) Notice 2021 was issued on 1 July 2021 (No G 26). The objectives of this Notice are to protect the abalone fishery and abalone aquaculture activities by reducing the risk of AVG spread due to specified activities.
- Control Order compliance has found no breaches [since the previous update](#). Fishing volumes at Portland remain low, especially since the reinstatement of the COVID-19 lockdown in Victoria.
- Surveillance and monitoring activity are being used to determine the extent of spread of disease. Samples have been collected from [121](#) dive sites since early May 2021. Of twenty-one (21) reef codes sampled to date across the Control Areas, eight (8) have been identified as infected, namely South Bridgewater/ Bully Cove, Seal Caves, Horseshoe, Murrels, Jones Bay, Inside Nelson, Outside Nelson, and Devils Kitchen. [No new reefs have been detected containing the virus.](#)

**Table 1: Cumulative surveillance and sampling data** from 01 May 2021 to [20 August 2021](#)

| Reef code    | Number of sites | Number abalone observed live | Number abalone observed freshly dead | Number of observed empty abalone shells | Number sick abalone | Number abalone tested for attachment | Number of abalone weakly attached | Number of abalone sampled | Number of abalone positive for AVG |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>121</b>      | <b>28,808</b>                | <b>167</b>                           | <b>3,219</b>                            | <b>113</b>          | <b>3,587</b>                         | <b>60</b>                         | <b>629</b>                | <b>135</b>                         |

\* NOTE – Cases marked with an asterisk have lab results still pending.

- The following activities remain prohibited in the Control Area: fishing from shore or boat with a sinker; use of commercial fishing or abalone equipment; and the use of hoop nets, bait traps, hauling nets and abalone levers for recreational fishing. All abalone, rock lobsters, sea urchins and other aquatic invertebrates cannot be collected, whether live or dead. Boats, vessels and fishing equipment cannot be anchored in the Control Area; however, a vessel can move through the area provided it does not stop. Activities such as swimming, surfing, paddle boarding and walking along the shore/rocks are allowed.
- *A Notice to Mariners was issued for Bass Strait – Portland* by Marine Safety Victoria 10 May 2021, detailing restrictions until further notice.
- There have been no product recalls or bans on abalone, and it is still safe for human consumption.

- Planning is being undertaken for transitioning the emergency response to an Ag Vic and VFA project to develop, in partnership with industry, the long-term approach to managing AVG as an established disease in wild populations.
- Ag Vic and VFA are currently developing an interim approach and will be seeking industry's input into this.
- Given evidence of established disease and the inability to eradicate AVG from the wild, a recommendation will be made to remove AVG from the list of exotic diseases under the LDCA.
- There have been positive discussions with the rock lobster industry regarding the voluntary adoption of biosecurity protocols when leaving/moving equipment from the zone adjacent to the Control Area. Biosecurity protocols have now been established.
- Ag Vic provided an update to the national Aquatic Consultative Committee for Exotic Animal Disease (AqCCEAD) on 13 July 2021.

## 5. Media and communications

- Website updated each Friday with latest control order and map. Information is available publicly on the Agriculture Victoria and Victorian Fisheries Authority websites:

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/abalone-disease>

<https://vfa.vic.gov.au/operational-policy/pests-and-diseases/abalone-disease>

- Social media posts about good biosecurity will be boosted until August 30.
- Advertising campaign for September and Christmas school holidays being developed.
- Detailed six month communication plan has endorsed by VFA and Ag Vic.
- A Vic Emergency alert is live on EMV website and updated to reflect to control order changes as of 9 July 2021.
- Who to contact for questions/issues?
  - Commercial abalone dive industry – Travis Baulch 0400 002 940
  - Farmed abalone industry – Tracey Bradley 0429 429 498

## Approval



Steve Campbell

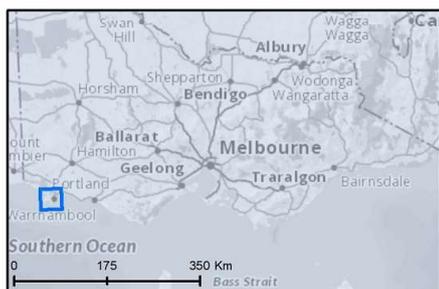
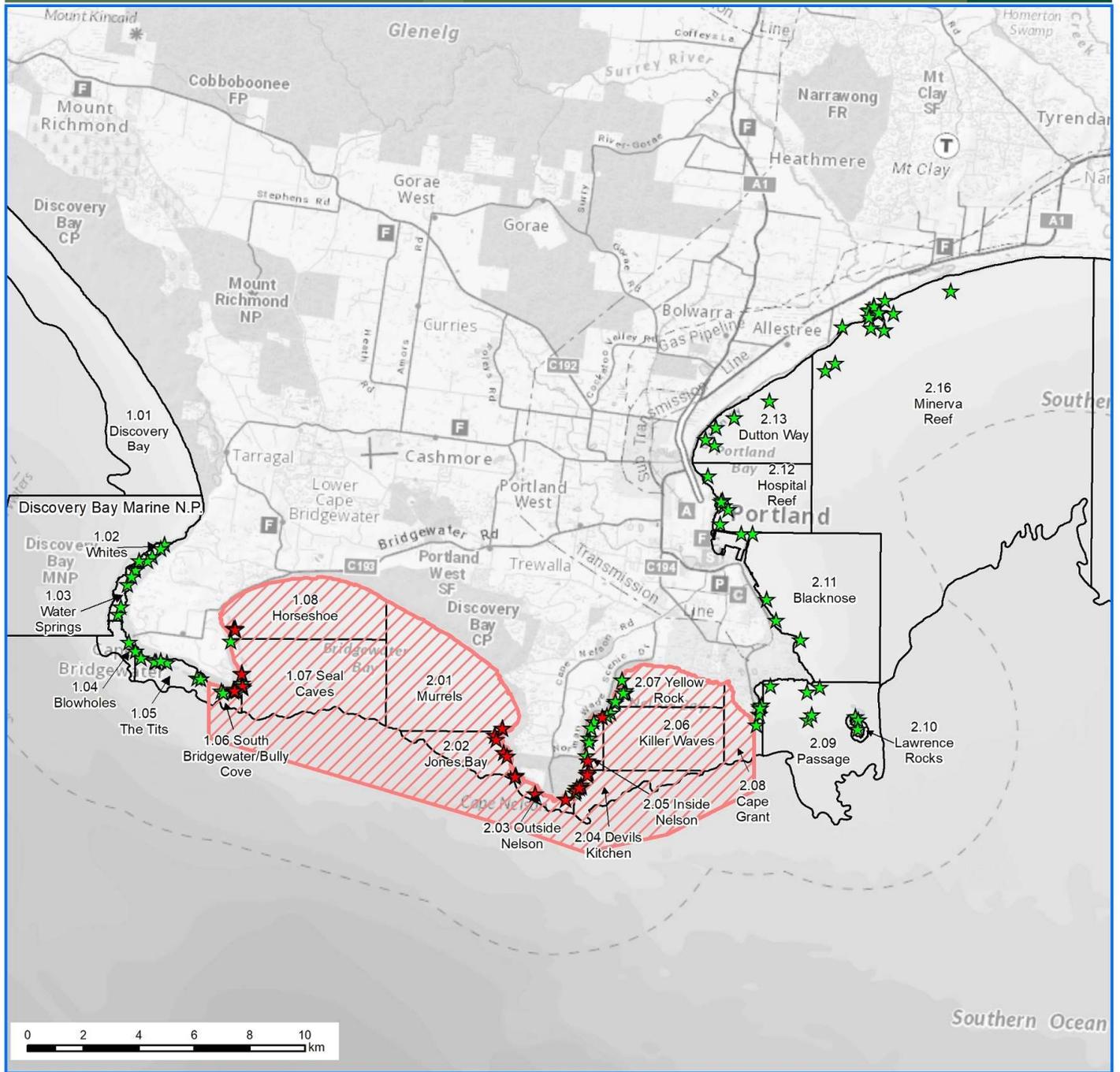
Incident Controller

20/08/2021

Figure 1. Abalone viral ganglioneuritis situational overview

# Abalone viral ganglioneuritis Situation Overview

20/08/2021 0900hrs



- ★ Positive Samples
- ★ Negative Samples
- ▨ Control Area
- ▭ Reef based surveillance areas

Author: tc29  
 Mapping Officer  
 Agriculture Victoria  
 Produced: 20 Aug 2021 at 09:00hrs

Copyright  
 © The State of Victoria  
 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. 2021

**Disclaimer**  
 This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.