

Factsheet

Valuing Victoria's Wild-Catch Fishing and Aquaculture Industries: measuring the economic and social contributions



Victoria has had a professional seafood industry for over 170 years. It's small relative to those of other Australian states but it's highly diverse, with a wide variety of fishing and farming methods and target species.

Wild-catch fisheries stretch along the Victorian coast from Portland to Mallacoota and through inland waterways. These fisheries include state licences, which tend to be small-scale, daily operations within three nautical miles of the coast, and Commonwealth permits that allow offshore fishing over multiple days. There are a number of visible fishing ports, but in addition small-scale fishing operations are dispersed along the coast and inland in towns with no obvious fishing infrastructure.

Aquaculture is similarly diverse. It operates throughout Victoria along the coast and inland, but with hubs of greater activity. Most aquaculture production and value lies with a few large farms, dominated by abalone on the south-west coast, mussel mariculture in Port Phillip Bay and salmonid aquaculture concentrated in the Goulburn Valley. While wild catch fisheries production has fallen over the past 20 years, aquaculture production has been growing.

The post-harvest sector in Victoria is one of the most significant in Australia. Processors, marketers and wholesalers are concentrated in Melbourne and handle Victorian-produced seafood as well as interstate and international imports and exports.

Until this study, there was little data on the economic and social contributions of professional fisheries and aquaculture in Victoria. Existing data calculated only the gross value of production, the number of licence owners, the number of seafood business owners or professional fisheries and aquaculture employees. There was no reporting of the broader 'multiplier' economic effects or the social and cultural benefits of having a seafood industry in Victoria.

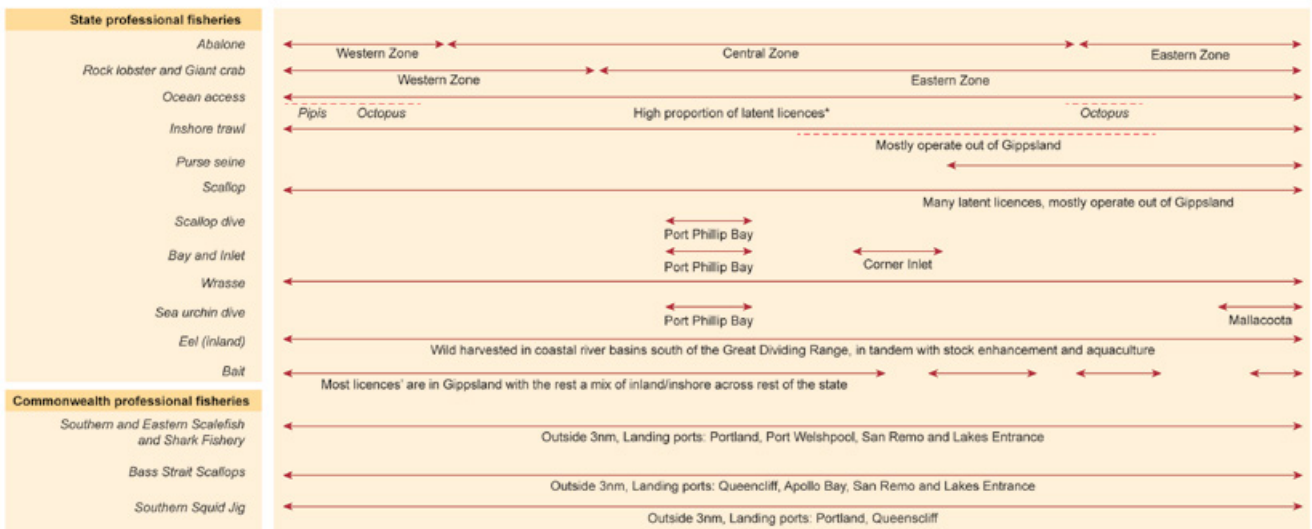
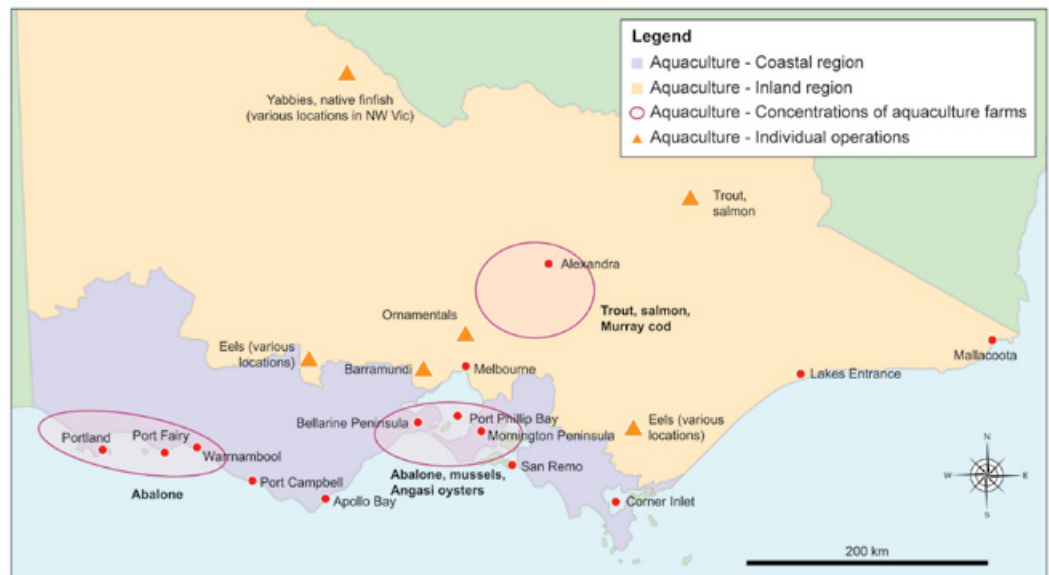


About the Study

This research, conducted by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), for the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, investigated how the Victorian fishing and aquaculture industries contribute to the wellbeing of regional communities, and to Victoria overall. This summary presents an overview of the key findings. The study found that this sector contributes to regional community wellbeing in five main ways:

- economic diversity and resilience
- food supply
- tourism and recreation
- environmental health
- social fabric

The project explored these contributions over two years and involved economic surveys of the fishing and aquaculture industries; in-depth interviews, workshops and surveys in regional communities; a large phone survey of the Victorian public; and surveys of tourism, hospitality and other businesses in seafood supply chains. The research also explored challenges and opportunities for these industries.



*Pipis and Octopus are currently managed under Ocean Access licences but with separate management plans, main fishing grounds identified

Economic diversity and resilience

Fisheries and aquaculture make significant economic contributions to Victoria

In the 2016/17 financial year fishing and aquaculture contributed:

- \$323 million of added value (\$112 million from State professional fisheries, \$111 million from Commonwealth professional fisheries, \$100 million aquaculture)
- \$186 million of household income (\$55 million State professional fisheries, \$74 million Commonwealth professional fisheries, \$56 million aquaculture)
- 3,101 full-time equivalent jobs (909 State professional fisheries, 1,205 Commonwealth professional fisheries, 987 aquaculture).

Processing of Victorian-produced seafood contributed:

- \$37 million of added value, beyond just the gross value of the landed catch
- 645 full-time jobs

Fisheries and aquaculture make significant economic contributions to regional areas

The economic contributions of professional fishing to regional Victoria in the 2016-17 financial year were:

- Far east coast (East Gippsland) – \$76 million of added value, 810 full-time jobs
- Near east coast (Gippsland, Mornington Peninsula) – \$26 million of added value, 298 full-time jobs
- Melbourne area (Melbourne, Geelong) – \$28 million of added value, 276 full-time jobs
- Near west coast (Bellarine Peninsula, Great Ocean Rd) – \$22 million of added value, 198 full-time jobs
- Far west coast (West of Warrnambool) – \$42 million of added value, 352 full-time jobs

The economic contributions of aquaculture to regional Victoria in the 2016-17 financial year were:

- Coastal aquaculture – \$35 million of added value, 427 full-time jobs
- Inland aquaculture – \$52 million of added value, 447 full-time jobs

Fisheries and aquaculture provide diverse employment and business opportunities

- These industries support opportunities from on-the-boat or farm work through to associated businesses, including those providing inputs; in transport, processing and sale; and tourism and hospitality operations.
- They require diverse and often high-level skills, but also provide entry-level jobs.
- They generate satisfying work for people who might otherwise find it hard to find jobs.
- In a survey of seafood wholesalers, processors and retailers, 94% said Victorian product is important to the success of their business.

Fisheries and aquaculture contribute to regional economic diversity and stability

- They diversify economic opportunity in regional towns, which is critical for resilience.
- They generate jobs in places where there are few alternative industries.
- They provide economic stability by being active through the year, versus seasonal activities such as tourism.

Coastal communities recognise the economic importance of the Victorian seafood industry

- 81% of residents surveyed believe the sector supports their local economy and provides jobs.
- 85% believe it helps create economic diversity in their community.
- 76% believe it's important for supporting their community during the tourist off-season.
- 68% are very or extremely concerned about job losses if fisheries should be further restricted.

Food supply

The seafood industry provides access to a nutritious and important food source

- Professional fisheries and aquaculture produced 18,179 tonnes of seafood in Victoria in 2016/17.
- Melbourne's post-harvest operations handle over 55,000 tonnes of seafood a year.
- 90% of Victorians surveyed believe it's important to produce local seafood and reduce reliance on imports (over 70% of seafood consumed in Australia is imported).

Victorians and coastal communities prefer local seafood

- 85% of Victorians surveyed prefer Australian seafood and 24% prefer Victorian seafood.
- The preference is even stronger in fishing towns, where 40% prefer seafood from their town or region.
- 74% of Victorians surveyed feel it is very or extremely important to know where their seafood comes from.
- They prefer local seafood because they believe it's fresher, safer and higher quality, and they want to support the Australian economy and seafood producers.
- Victorian seafood caters for local consumers' preferred species and price points, and their ethnic diversity.
- People go to great effort to buy Victorian seafood, regularly travelling substantial distances to 'stock up'.

The post-harvest sector experiences high demand for local seafood

- Food localism among consumers is a growing trend benefiting seafood businesses around the state.
- Retailers and wholesalers say having Victorian produce helps project an image of freshness and quality.
- 62% of post-harvest businesses surveyed say the demand for local seafood is growing
- 80% say demand for Victorian seafood is greater than for imported seafood
- 58% say demand for Victorian seafood is greater than for interstate seafood
- 96% of hospitality businesses surveyed say their customers want to know the origin of their seafood

Tourism and recreation

Victorian communities believe the seafood industry contributes to tourism

- 67% of residents surveyed in Victorian regional towns believe the most important contribution the local seafood industry makes to communities is through the interactions with and benefits flowing to tourism.

Consuming seafood is part of the coastal travel experience for international and domestic visitors

- Visitors place increasing importance on local food provenance and food production experiences.
- 81% of Victorians surveyed say eating local seafood is an important part of their holiday experience.
- 94% of tourism businesses surveyed say eating local seafood is an important part of the tourism experience.
- International visitors, particularly from Asia, are the tourists most interested in eating local seafood, which includes cultural delicacies such as abalone and rock lobster, from a clean environment.
- There's considerable unmet demand, with 54% of tourism businesses surveyed reporting that regional tourism suffers from a lack of access to locally produced seafood.

The seafood industry is important to the character and appeal of coastal towns for visitors

- 88% of tourism operators surveyed say the fishing industry adds to the character of coastal towns.
- 86% say the history of fishing is an important part of the tourism offering.
- 69% of Victorians surveyed enjoy watching commercial fishers at work while on holiday.

The professional fishing industry also benefits recreational fishers

Professional fishing and recreational fishers are often portrayed as being at odds. However, the study found evidence throughout the state that professional and recreational activities positively intersect.

- 82% of recreational fishers are very or extremely interested in professional fishing.
- Recreational fishers are more likely than non-fishers to want to buy fresh and local seafood, with 82% saying they consider origin 'very' or 'extremely' important versus 72% of non-fishers.
- Over 80% of recreational fishers surveyed prefer to use local, commercially caught bait.
- Marine infrastructure (such as wharves) servicing commercial fishing is also used by recreational fishers.
- Professional fishers often provide advice on fishing and sea conditions to recreational fishers.
- Aquaculturists support recreational angling by stocking publicly accessible waterways with target species.
- Aquaculture infrastructure, such as mussel ropes, act as fish attracting devices for recreational fishing.
- 58% of professional fishers surveyed had helped recreational users of the sea in distress in the past five years.

Environmental health

The fishing industry provides data for managing Victorian fish stocks and the marine environment

- Data collected as part of regulatory oversight and management is used for managing commercial and recreational fisheries sustainably, and for monitoring ecosystems.
- 82% of Victorian fish stocks assessed are classified as 'sustainable' or 'recovering'.

The fishing and aquaculture industries act voluntarily to improve stocks and the aquatic environment

- Reducing the carbon footprint of operations
- Implementing codes of practice
- Testing water quality throughout Victorian waterways
- Restoring reef habitats by removing invasive sea urchins
- Removing invasive carp from freshwater systems
- Monitoring and mapping habitat loss in Corner Inlet
- Data collection for fine-scale management in the abalone fishery
- Taking part in the Clean Green Program for sustainable and responsible rock lobster fishing.
- Providing training to minimise wildlife interactions.
- Installing devices for avoiding seabird interactions in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark fishery
- Taking care of injured wildlife

The fishing and aquaculture industries voluntarily collaborate with researchers

- Collecting samples and providing logistics support
- Sharing their local ecological knowledge
- Sitting on voluntary advisory groups and research committees

Social fabric

Fishing and aquaculture contributes to the sense of identity in regional communities

- 83% of residents surveyed agree fishing and aquaculture is important to cultural heritage and identity.
- Many coastal towns were founded on fishing and much infrastructure was set up by fishing families.
- Seafood festivals, supported by local industry, foster social connections and reinforce community identity.
- Fishing, particularly for eels, has played a prominent role in the life and culture of Aboriginal communities across Victoria for thousands of years and continues to do so.

These industries play an important role in community life

- 79% of residents surveyed agree that local fishing families are active community members.
- Fishing and aquaculture businesses support and donate to local events and charities.
- The fishing industry provides work, a support network and role models for vulnerable young men.



Challenges and opportunities

Improving public understanding of the seafood sector and its contributions

The project revealed there's often poor understanding of the fishing and aquaculture industries among the Victorian public, both in metropolitan areas and in fishing and aquaculture communities themselves. There's substantial opportunity to improve engagement with the public, in turn helping to address misperceptions, reduce tension and conflict, build support for the sector and strengthen its future.

Key areas of misperception or lack of knowledge include:

- The misperception that Victorian seafood production is unsustainable
- The extent of the sector's environmental credentials, which go beyond what's regulated
- The contribution to food supply – does the Victorian public want local seafood or only imports?

Specific responses could include:

- Industry-led engagement activities with Victorian communities to improve awareness of the sector through the fostering of cross-sector and cross-industry relationships within communities and regions.
- Enhancing and expanding voluntary environmental activities beyond immediate operations of fishing and farming, such as participating in local projects to improve the aquatic environment.

Providing improved access to Victorian seafood

The need – and opportunity – to provide greater access to locally produced and diverse Victorian seafood was raised frequently during the project. Given reduced seafood production in Victoria, regional communities in particular saw a clear need to develop new, sustainable opportunities to address demand (while also considering barriers such as continuity of supply and price).

Beyond the generic opportunity to provide the public and tourists with more access to Victorian seafood, three key opportunities emerged:

- **Making seafood more accessible in regional towns near to fishing and aquaculture operations, by:**
 - Improving collaboration among operators so local wholesale/retail networks have greater diversity and more stable supply, at the same time reducing transaction costs for producers.
 - Developing financially viable opportunities for new relationships between producers and local businesses that might want to sell their products.
 - Fostering links between aquaculture and wild-catch suppliers, to support both diversity and continuity of supply locally.
 - increasing the diversity and volume of seafood available to the local market by exploring new opportunities particularly for underutilised species and bycatch.
- **Expanding the use of local seafood in restaurants, by:**
 - Strengthening the hospitality sector's ability to work with local and seasonal seafood species.
 - Recognising Victorian seafood's unique selling points and the opportunity to build brands around this.
 - Improving country of origin labelling in restaurants
 - Mandating standard names for seafood.
- **Increasing access to underutilised species and growing the aquaculture sector to serve demand, by:**
 - Developing new ecologically and financially sustainable fisheries for underutilised species.
 - improving the marketing, awareness and demand for currently unpopular species caught in fisheries.
 - Exploring by-product regulations to reduce wastage and support diversity.
 - Increasing aquaculture production (given sustainable feed supplies and appropriate management so as not to damage wild-catch fisheries).

Strengthening relationships between the seafood and tourism industries

The study found that the links between the Victorian seafood industry and tourism industry are weak. That said, communities, tourism operators and seafood producers all recognise the clear opportunity to improve connections.

This can be done, most obviously, through food supply (as described above) and by capturing the growing international tourist market. Beyond food supply, the key opportunity to improve the contribution of the sector to tourism and regional economies is by developing fishing and aquaculture tourism 'experiences'.

Experiences are about tourists interacting with and experiencing the seafood industry. An example of an 'experience' is a tour offered by a seafood industry operator. Fishers and aquaculturists won't necessarily have the time or skills to develop and promote tourism opportunities, so it will be necessary to build relationships and partnerships with tour operators, tourism boards and local governments.

Fresh local seafood is important for tourism and hospitality as well as for regional economies in Victoria. A collaborative approach to enhance and promote local supplies of seafood is needed to put the sector on a sustainable footing for the future.



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Images: Apollo Bay Co-op, Kirsten Abernethy, Mitchelson Family,
Seafood Industry Victoria, Victorian Fisheries Authority