

Factsheet

Valuing Victoria's professional fishing: measuring economic and social contributions in Near East Victoria



The near east region of Victoria includes communities on the Mornington Peninsula and the Gippsland communities of San Remo and Corner Inlet. The diverse fisheries in the region include Southern Rock Lobster, live Wrasse, abalone, Southern Scalefish and Shark, the inshore net fisheries of Port Phillip Bay and Corner Inlet, and inshore trawl. San Remo has an active Fishermen's Co-op trading in locally caught seafood (mainly shark and lobster), Corner Inlet fish and other Victorian catches.

The Mornington Peninsula suffered a substantial contraction in 2016, when the sustainable, small-scale net fishery in Port Phillip Bay was shut to make way for recreational fishing. As a result, an annual catch of 600 tonnes a year of high-quality and diverse finfish is no longer available to consumers in local communities and Melbourne, after 170 years of access. Corner Inlet is the only bay and inlet net fishery remaining in Victoria.

The fishing industry is historically important and helped build communities in the near east. The Corner Inlet fishery is important for the very small, remote communities of Port Albert, Port Welshpool and Port Franklin. While the fisheries of San Remo have contracted, the industry has reinvigorated itself by focussing on selling locally caught fish direct to consumers and creating linkages with tourism and recreational fisheries.



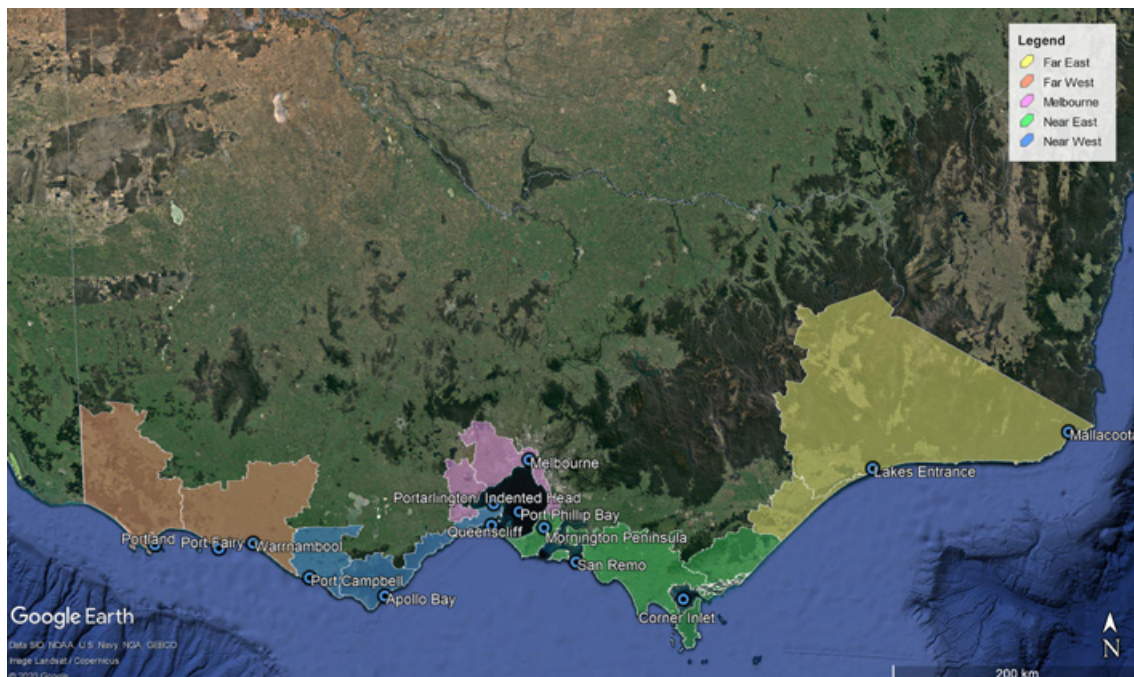
About the Study

This research project, conducted by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), for the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, investigated how the Victorian fishing and aquaculture industry contributes to the wellbeing of regional communities, and to Victoria overall.

This summary presents findings relevant to the professional fisheries and communities in the near east region. The study found the industry 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 industry; 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 the fishing and aquaculture industry.



Economic diversity and resilience

Near east fisheries generate significant economic contributions to the region

- Professional fisheries contributed \$26 million of added value – the wider economic contribution beyond just landed catch – to the near east region in the 2016/17 financial year.
- Professional fisheries contributed 298 full-time jobs.

Near east fisheries provide diverse employment opportunities

- The industry supports a range of business and job opportunities, from on-the-boat work to associated businesses including those providing inputs into seafood production, post-harvest businesses that transport, process and sell seafood products, and tourism and hospitality operations.
- It requires diverse and often high-level skills, but also provide entry-level jobs.
- It generates satisfying work for people who might otherwise find it hard to find jobs.

Near east fisheries contribute to economic diversity and stability

- The industry contributes to a diversity of economic opportunity that is critical for economic resilience.
- The industry contributes to employment in places where there are few alternative industries. In San Remo, the Fishermen's Co-op is an important economic contributor. In Corner Inlet, communities are very small, with few alternative employment opportunities apart from farming.

- The industry contributes to economic stability by providing activity throughout the year, whereas industries such as tourism operate seasonally or intermittently. This is particularly the case in San Remo, where there is a significant but short tourist season for visitors to neighbouring Phillip Island.

Coastal communities recognise the economic importance of the Victorian fishing industry

- Residents of Victorian fishing communities surveyed said they recognise the economic importance of the fishing industry to their region:
 - 81% believe the industry supports their local economy and provides jobs.
 - 85% believe the industry helps create economic diversity in their community.
 - 76% believe the industry is important for supporting the community in the tourist off-season.
 - 68% are very or extremely concerned about job losses should fisheries be further restricted.

Food supply

Professional fishers provide access to a food source otherwise unavailable to non-fishers

- The near east accounted for 16% of the seafood professionally caught in Victoria in 2016/17.
- In San Remo, the industry has made considerable efforts to develop a market for direct sales to consumers, which the community recognises as a very positive shift.
- A diversity of fish species is caught in Corner Inlet. A proportion is sold locally but the catch is highly prized and recognised for its quality in Melbourne.
- Near east fisheries provide seafood important to ethnic groups, such as abalone and Wrasse.
- Victorians and tourists travel to buy and eat the local seafood available in the near east.

Victorians and coastal communities prefer local seafood

- 85% of Victorians prefer Australian seafood and 24% prefer Victorian seafood.
- The preference for Victorian seafood is even stronger among residents of coastal fishing towns, where 40% of respondents preferred seafood from their town or region.
- 74% of Victorians feel it is very or extremely important to know where their seafood comes from.
- 90% of Victorians believe it is important to produce seafood in Victoria and reduce reliance on imports, which account for over 70% of seafood consumed in Australia.
- Victorians prefer local seafood because:
 - They believe it is fresher and higher quality
 - They want to support the Australian economy and fishers
 - They believe it is safer to eat, and it is from cleaner waters

The hospitality sector experiences high demand for local seafood

- 62% of the hospitality sector surveyed says demand for local seafood is growing.
- 80% of those surveyed say demand for Victorian seafood is greater than for imported seafood.
- 58% of say demand for Victorian seafood is greater than for seafood from other states.



Tourism and recreation

Victorian coastal communities believe the fishing industry contributes to tourism

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

Consuming seafood is part of the coastal travel experience

- 81% of Victorians surveyed say eating local seafood is an important part of their holiday experience.
- 88% of Victorians expect to eat local seafood when visiting the coast.
- 90% of Victorian tourism operators surveyed say tourists expect to eat local seafood.
- International visitors, particularly from Asia, are the group of visitors most interested in local seafood.
- Victorian seafood producers have a particularly desirable product for international visitors, offering cultural delicacies such as abalone and rock lobster along with a clean environment.
- In San Remo, the industry is building a reputation for providing desirable seafood experiences – such as tasting platters from the Co-op, and access to fresh local fish direct from Bass Strait.
- In Corner Inlet, locally caught fish is available in local restaurants.

The fishing industry is important to the character and appeal of coastal towns

- The industry is key to San Remo's character and aligns with the region's 'natural environment' brand.
- The fishing industry is key to the character of the small communities of Corner Inlet
- 88% of Victorian tourism operators surveyed say the fishing industry adds to the character of towns.
- 86% of tourism operators say the history of fishing is an important part of the tourism offering.
- 69% of Victorians holidaymakers surveyed enjoy watching commercial fishers at work.

Seafood experiences contribute to developing regional tourism

- There are two seafood festivals in the region: the San Remo Fishing Festival, which is a collaboration between the professional and recreational sectors, and the Kilcunda Lobster Festival.
- Tourists stopping in San Remo for fish and chips can watch pelican feeding at the Co-op, which also educates visitors about the fishing industry.
- Links with tourism operators are occurring in San Remo – such as supplying seafood to charter companies and providing information on wildlife sightings.

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.
- Infrastructure (such as boat ramps) servicing commercial fishing is also used by recreational fishers.
- Professional fishers often provide advice on fishing and sea conditions to recreational fishers.
- 58% of professionals surveyed had helped recreational users of the sea in distress in the past 5 years.



Environmental health

The near east fishing industry contributes to 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 near east industry undertakes voluntary practices to improve fish stocks and the marine environment

- The fishing industry in the near east undertakes voluntary activities aimed at improving sustainability and environmental health, including:
 - A voluntary code of practice for bay and inlet fisheries, including for Corner Inlet.
 - Installation of devices for avoiding seabird interactions.
 - Taking part in the Clean Green Program for sustainable and responsible rock lobster fishing.
 - Corner Inlet fishers undertake activities such as seaweed loss monitoring, seagrass mapping, water quality testing and partner in the Corner Inlet Connections program to address threats.
 - In San Remo, the industry is committed to reducing its environmental footprint through recycling, renewable energy, reducing plastic and minimising processing waste.
 - The San Remo Co-op cares for injured pelicans.
- The near east fishing industry voluntarily collaborates in research, including:
 - Collecting samples for researchers
 - Providing logistics and local knowledge
 - Sitting on advisory groups and research committees
 - Sharing accumulated local ecological knowledge gained through their fishing experience

Social fabric

Fishing contributes to the sense of identity in near east coastal communities

- 83% of residents surveyed in fishing towns agree fishing is important to heritage and identity.
- In San Remo, the fishing industry is important historically and is a big part of the identity of the town.
- In Corner Inlet, commercial fishing started in 1874. Many of the fishing families in the small communities are multigenerational and fishing remains a strong part of community identity.

The fishing industry plays an important role in community life

- 79% of residents surveyed in fishing towns agree fishing families are active community members.
- The near east fishing industry donates and sponsors local events, clubs, schools and charities.
- The San Remo industry works with local schools.
- The San Remo festival is a grassroots event that fosters social connections and community identity.
- The fishing industry provides work, a support network and role models for vulnerable young men.

Challenges and opportunities

Increasing local production and community access to local seafood

Communities in the near east have reasonable access to local seafood, but it could be greater.

- Advocacy is needed for new, sustainable wild-catch fishing opportunities, including under-utilised and affordable species that offer viable and sustainable business models. This is particularly so in San Remo, where there is limited diversity of locally caught species.
- Branding could be built around the provenance and unique selling points of local near east seafood.
- New relationships should be developed between producers and interested local businesses.

Getting more local seafood onto local menus

It's challenging for near east restaurants to access local seafood – 90% of Victorian hospitality businesses say the price of local seafood has increased in the last few years, and 78% say it has been difficult to source. In the near east specifically, restaurants say prices are high compared to imports. Outside boutique restaurants, there's a perceived lack of capacity to cook local seafood. Possible solutions include:

- Collaboration between fishers, wholesalers and hospitality businesses to improve local supply chains.
- Strengthening of the hospitality industry's capacity to work with local and seasonal seafood.

Developing fishing and seafood tourism experiences

There's an opportunity to further develop tourism experiences in the near east. Victoria-wide, 54% of tourism operators agree that the local tourism offering suffers from a lack of access to seafood and there are limited fishing tourism activities. Opportunities include:

- Building greater collaboration with tourism stakeholders and local councils to promote local seafood.
- Developing additional seafood festivals.
- Trading more on the 'fishing village' brand in San Remo.
- The fishing industry doesn't necessarily have the capacity to develop tourism experiences but there's an opportunity to either skill the industry or create partnerships to generate 'seafood experiences'.

Increasing fishing industry engagement with communities

The fishing industry isn't always well understood among the general public – whether in metropolitan areas or in coastal communities themselves. Improving engagement with the public could help address misperceptions, reduce tension and conflict, build support for the industry and strengthen its future.

Industry-led engagement activities with coastal communities could improve awareness of the fishing industry in the near east, by fostering cross-sector and cross-industry relationships within communities and regions.

It's particularly important for Corner Inlet fishers to build understanding and support for the industry among the public, given the closure of inshore net fisheries across Victoria. While some awareness raising work has been done, there's an opportunity to unify the fishery, promote its importance – especially its environment credentials – and engage with the recreational sector.

In San Remo, there's demand for the story of the history of the fishing industry to be told.

