



Factsheet

Valuing Victoria's professional fishing: measuring economic and social contributions in Far West Victoria



Far west Victoria is one of the state's most productive fishing regions. Three home ports – Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland – support a diversity of professional fisheries, including abalone, pipi, Southern Rock Lobster, Wrasse, Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark, and Southern Squid. Inland, there is professional eel fishing. Eels have played a prominent role in Aboriginal life and culture across south-western Victoria for thousands of years and strong connections remain. The far west also has a regional processing, wholesale and retail sector for rock lobster, abalone, squid and finfish, located in different ports.

The fishing industry is historically important and helped to build communities in the far west, particularly Port Fairy and Portland. Over past decades the fishing fleet and associated industries have contracted, mainly due to restructuring and the introduction of quotas, though abalone suffered a devastating virus in 2006.

While the seafood industry isn't as visible in communities as it once was, it still makes important contributions that are recognised by local communities – and there are opportunities to grow this contribution.



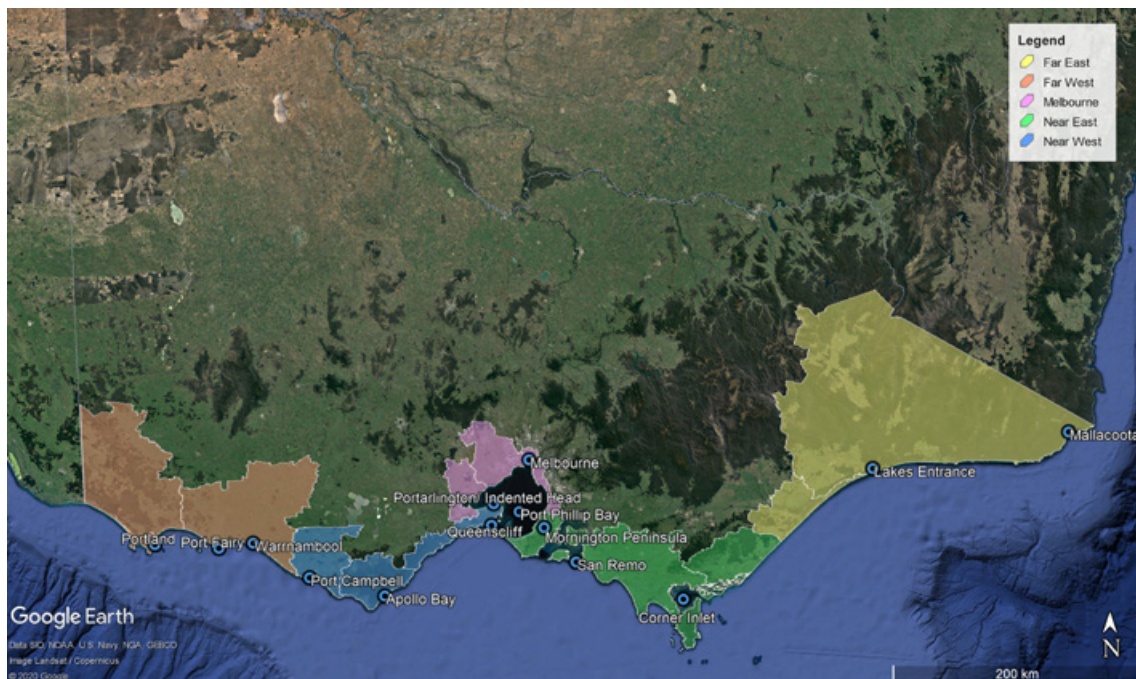
About the Study

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 far west 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 in regional communities.



Economic diversity and resilience

Far west fisheries generate significant economic contributions to the region

- Professional fisheries contributed \$41.7 million of added value – the wider economic contributions beyond just landed catch – to the far west region in the 2016/17 financial year.
- Professional fisheries contributed 352 full-time jobs.

Far west 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 provides entry-level jobs.
- It generates satisfying work for people who might otherwise find it hard to find jobs.

Far west fisheries contribute to economic diversity and stability

- The fishing industry contributes to diversity of economic opportunity that is critical for economic resilience.
- The fishing industry contributes to employment in places where there are few alternative industries.
- The fishing industry contributes to economic stability by providing economic activity throughout the year, whereas other industries, such as tourism, operate seasonally or intermittently.

Coastal communities recognise the economic importance of the Victorian fishing industry

- Residents of Victorian fishing communities surveyed said they recognised 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 their community during 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 far west accounted for 14% of the 15,032 tonnes of seafood professionally caught in Victoria in 2016/17.
- The region produces premium seafood such as 'Warrnambool Reds' rock lobster and wild-caught abalone.
- A number of far west fisheries provide seafood important to ethnic groups, including abalone and Wrasse.

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 for 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 to communities is through the interactions with and benefits flowing to tourism.

Consuming seafood is part of the travel experience along the Victorian coast

- 81% of Victorians surveyed say eating local seafood is an important part of their coastal 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 when visiting the coast.
- International visitors, particularly from Asia, are the group of visitors most interested in eating 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.

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

- Professional fishing is intrinsic to the character of Port Fairy, Portland and Warrnambool and attracts tourists.
- 88% of Victorian tourism operators surveyed say the fishing industry adds to the character of towns.
- 86% of Victorian 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.

The professional fishing industry 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.
- 58% of professional fishers surveyed had helped recreational users of the sea in distress in the past five years.

Environmental health

The far west 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'.
- In the far west, 100% of the region's main fish stocks assessed are sustainable.

The far west industry undertakes voluntary practices to improve fish stocks and the marine environment

- Installing devices for avoiding seabird interactions in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark fishery.
- Collecting data for fine-scale management in the Western Zone abalone fishery.
- Taking part in the Clean Green Program for sustainable and responsible rock lobster fishing.
- Collaborating in research, particularly with researchers from Deakin University in Warrnambool. This includes:
 - Helping with collecting samples for researchers
 - Providing logistics and local knowledge
 - Sitting on advisory groups and research committees
 - Sharing accumulated local ecological knowledge gained through experience of fishing

Social fabric

Fishing contributes to the sense of identity in far west coastal communities

- 83% of residents surveyed in Victorian coastal fishing towns agree that fishing is important to their cultural heritage and community identity.
- In Port Fairy, much of the community infrastructure was set up by fishing families.
- In Portland, a study by the local council found that the community is still attached to, and identifies with, its rich maritime heritage.
- Fishing festivals, such as the Upwelling Festival in Portland, help to foster social connections and reinforce community identity.
- Eels have played a prominent role in Aboriginal life and culture for Aboriginal communities across far western Victoria for thousands of years and continue to do so today.

The fishing industry plays an important role in community life

- 79% of residents from Victorian coastal fishing towns agree that local fishing families are active community members.
- The far west fishing industry provides donations and sponsorship of local events, clubs, schools and charities.
- The fishing industry provides work, a support network and role models for vulnerable young men in their communities.



Challenges and opportunities

Increasing local production and community access to local seafood

The fishing industry has contracted and so the supply of local seafood in the far west has diminished. The majority of seafood now caught in the far west is sent to Melbourne or overseas for export.

- Far west coastal communities clearly expressed a desire for greater access to locally sourced seafood.
- Advocacy is needed for new, sustainable wild-catch fishing opportunities, including under-utilised and affordable species that offer viable and sustainable business models.
- Improved local supply chains and collaboration are needed to ensure a diversity of seafood and stable supply.
- Relationships should be developed between producers and local businesses that would like to sell local seafood products, to improve local supply chains.
- Branding could be built around the provenance and unique selling points of local far west seafood.

Getting more local seafood on local menus

It's challenging for far west restaurants to access local seafood – 90% of Victorian hospitality businesses surveyed say the price of local seafood has increased in the last few years, and 78% say it has been difficult to source local seafood. In the far west specifically, restaurants say prices are variable and high compared to imports, there are few opportunities to buy direct from the boat, and there's a lack of capacity within the hospitality industry to cook 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 locally produced and seasonal seafood.

Developing fishing and seafood tourism experiences

Fishing and seafood tourism experiences are limited in the far west – Victoria-wide, 54% of tourism operators agree that the local tourism offering suffers from a lack of access to local seafood and there are limited fishing tourism activities.

- Tourism stakeholders see an opportunity for partnerships with the fishing industry, particularly with the growing self-drive Asian tourist market, who travel beyond the Great Ocean Road and are interested in iconic far west species such as abalone and rock lobster.
- Fishers and tourism stakeholders could co-develop tourism opportunities.
- Seafood festivals are emerging across Victoria, but there is no seafood or fishing festival in the far west.

Increasing fishing industry engagement with their communities

The fishing industry is not 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 far west, through cross-sector and cross industry relationships within communities and regions.



