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Around the Jetties

Information Sheet Prepared by Lynton Barr

Banning Netting at the Gippsland Lakes River Mouth

Material printed in red are direct quotes from the report of Craig Ingram

The following is a brief summary of the report released on the 26th August delivering on the election commitment to ban netting at the mouth of Gippsland Rivers as part of the current State Governments Target One Million program. This project was aimed at allowing the migratory fish to freely pass between the lakes and rivers. The 22 page report resulted from the study conducted by **Craig Ingram Coordinator of the Target One Million Program**, and involved wide ranging consultation with stakeholders. (Over 50 submissions were received involving commercial and recreational a fishers tourism authorities and others.)

A number of issues were raised in discussions and submissions and included low recreational catch rates, black bream sustainability, netting in areas of high public use, and the effect of the decline of recreational fishing on the local economy, involving hospitality, bait and tackle outlets. Evidence was provided of the decline in membership of some local fishing clubs and the declining visits of fishing clubs to the Gippsland Lakes and rivers.

There are currently ten Gippsland Lakes Licence holders reduced from 32 in 1999 with the last reduction occurring in 2005. **The report indicates that in the main the financial investment to buy out commercial licences has come from recreational fishing licence holders.** Since 2001 around 70% of the commercial catch is taken in mesh nets with only 16% by haul seine and 5% by prawn stake net, with black bream the major and most valuable species caught. Mesh nets are used by commercial fishers in the area of river mouths. Management of the fishery is complex given the importance of the black bream to the recreational fishery .

“The management of the Gippsland Lakes fishery by Fisheries Victoria has come under heavy scrutiny during my consultation, particularly from the recreational community.”

Black Bream Stocks in the Gippsland Lakes

This report indicates a lower level of bream recruitment today as compared with the 1970's and 1980's. There has been a decrease in the proportion of older bream ie. fish greater than 8 years harvested by commercial and recreational fishers. In 2002 the minimum size limit was increased from 26 to 28cm. This change was made to address the concern of low catch rates.

“The recreational catch rate is low with recent catch rates of less than one fish every three hours.”
The decline in abundance of older bream raises concern, as this would be having an effect on reproductive capacity of the Gippsland Lakes population.

“The current management of black bream in the lakes has disenfranchised the recreational fishing community and is in my view a major reason the commercial fishery has faced ongoing calls for removal.”

Recommendations

This concern at netting at the mouth of rivers is not new and has been in place for over 100 years. The 2009 regulations prohibit licence holders from fishing within 400 metres of the mouth of any river or creek flowing into the Gippsland Lakes. Eel and bait fisheries can net within this 400 metres and this can be confusing and lead to a level of complaints. Some of the main fish targeted are highly migratory. A recent study showed black bream recorded travelling distances up to 2600kms in the twelve month study. These fish regularly moved between river systems and this makes them vulnerable to mesh netting at river mouths when they enter or exit streams.

“In my view an expansion of the area and providing clarity in the boundaries strikes the right balance between the sectors and protecting fish at the river mouths.”

Recommendation 1

My proposed changes provide an expansion of 50% of the exclusion zone, and to provide clear landmarks. I am also recommending that these boundaries be established as clear straight lines using identifiable landmarks. The 2009 Fisheries regulations be amended to clearly define the exclusion zone.

Recommendation 2

The maps of the exclusion zones to be included as a schedule to Fisheries Regulations 2009

Recommendation 3.

The new exclusion zones be marked where practical with identifiable markers on the lake shore at each boundary.

There is a high level of support for having clear markings for exclusion zones and more clearly defined boundaries.

Marking of Nets

There is evidence of minimal marking of nets, which creates an impression of hiding an activity and also it poses a danger for vessels in the area. The nets should be marked with a surface buoy with the relevant number.

Recommendation 4

Section 64 of Fisheries Regulations to be amended to set visibility requirements including sizes and colours for buoys marking Fishery Access Licence mesh nets.. Other gear that can be used near a river mouth exclusion zone to be marked with a different colour. This will allow fyke nets to be used in an exclusion zone.

Estuary Perch and Australian Bass

A number of submissions from the recreational sector raised the issue of the commercial targeting of Australian bass and estuary perch. Estuary perch were the dominant species in the Gippsland Lakes when the area was first settled, but stocks collapsed around 1900. Estuary perch and bass are a long lived, slow growing species whose migration and aggregating habits make them vulnerable to commercial and recreational fishers.

“The recovery of Australian bass has been identified as a priority for the recreational fishing community.”

Over 700,000 Australian bass have been stocked in the catchment since 2002. The estuary perch has also been recognised as a high value species by the recreational community leading to stocking in Gippsland waters.

Recommendation 5

That Australian bass be included in the Fisheries Regulations 2009 as a species which is prohibited to be taken by commercial fishers.

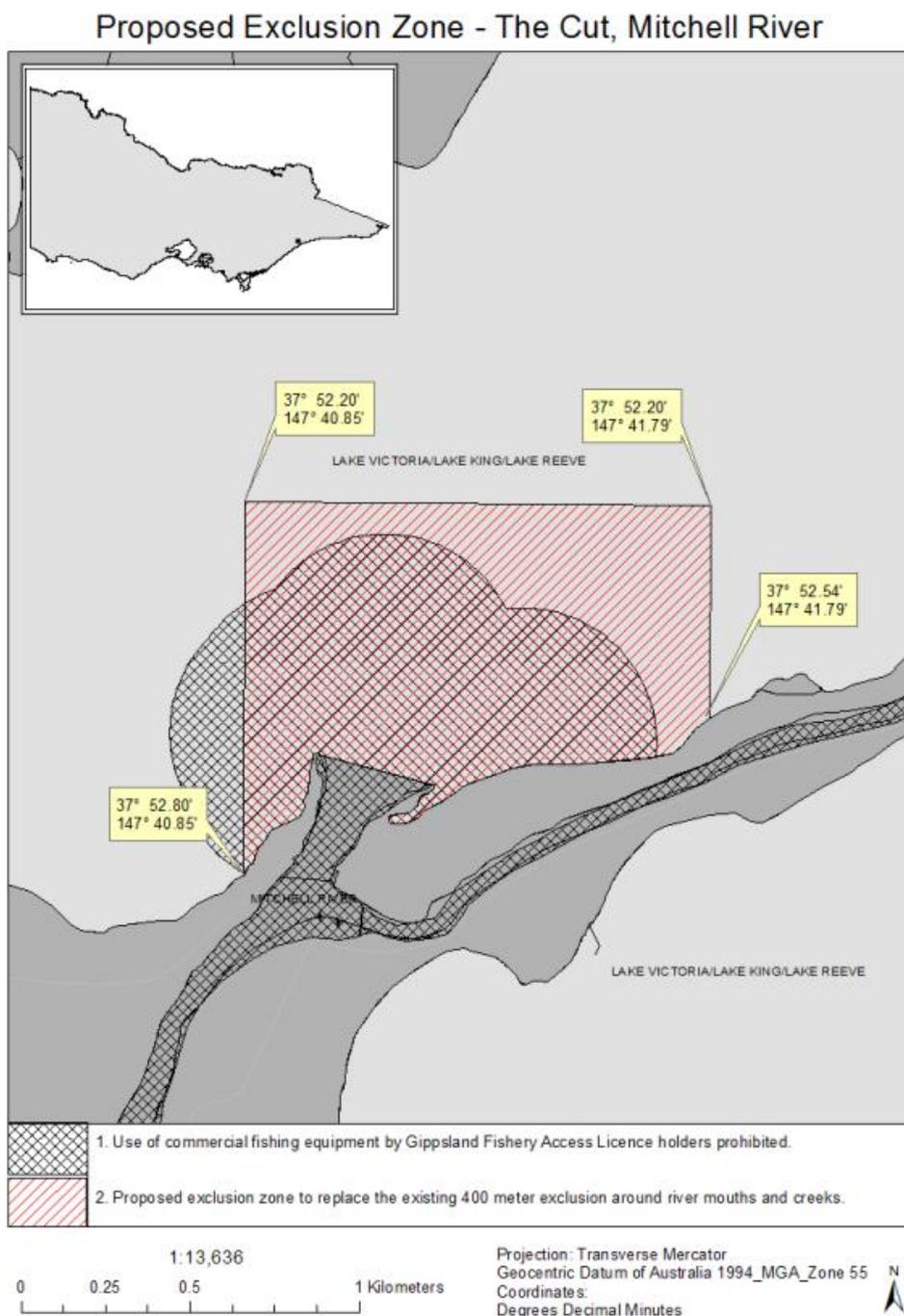
“Estuary perch are caught in higher numbers than Australian bass and are not as hardy making them not a viable option for release from mesh nets.”

Of concern is the increase of soak times of mesh nets with the majority between 8-12 hours some nets have had a 24 hour soak time and this can lead to fish wastage and provides a potential for protected species mortalities. It is suggested that commercial fishers should have more active fishing practices with shorter daylight soak times and even licence holders being required to be in attendance of set mesh nets during daylight hours. Longer soak times affect the ability of commercial fishers releasing estuary perch.

Conclusion *“The decline in the numbers of older black bream in the system is readily observable. This raises the question about the current level of harvest and is likely to be a limiting factor in the ability of bream stocks to recover.”*

Editors Comment

Congratulations to Craig Ingram for his work on this report and to the State Government for its commitment to protect fish at river mouths in the Gippsland Lakes. These recommendations will become law in 2017. My one disappointment with this report is the fact that estuary perch an iconic species with a long history in the Gippsland Lakes will be taken by commercial fishers and marketed. The reason this species is caught and sold seems largely the result of inefficient soak times when mesh nets are being used. I believe this is a species we should be protecting from mesh netting and developing the species in the same way as Australian bass numbers are being developed in the catchment.



Sample Map of the Proposed Exclusion Zone for the Cut Mitchell River. The ten maps to be a schedule to the 2009 Fisheries Regulations.

For Full Report and all maps go to

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/fisheries/policy-and-planning/fisheries-consultation/current-consultation/netting-of-gippslands-river-mouths>

Heading [Gippsland lakes report with maps](#)  [\[MS Word Document - 3.3 MB\]](#)

Fisheries Victoria is coming to a Venue near You

Fisheries Victoria is committed to consulting widely with anglers, and this Public Forum will give anglers a chance to learn about what Fisheries is doing to improve recreational fishing across the State.

Recreational Forum for Anglers

Mark This date- 2nd November Lake Tyers

Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club Recreation Reserve 7.30

**Attending Will Be- Travis Dowling Director Fisheries Victoria
Craig Ingram Target One Million Coordinator
Anthony Foster Fish Stocking Program**

At the conclusion of the forum Lake Tyers Beach Angling Club will provide supper.

This is a wonderful opportunity for anglers to raise questions with the executive Director of Fisheries Victoria Travis Dowling, and Craig Ingram who has just released the Report **Banning Netting at River Mouths in the Gippsland Lakes.** (See Previous Report)

This Forum is one of eight being run by Fisheries Victoria across the state. Don't miss this Forum

Mansfield Trout Conference a Must for Anglers Saturday November 5th Mansfield.

This one day conference follows the successful Wild Trout Conference held in 2015 and which attracted 200 anglers.

The 2016 Wild Trout Conference will involve Fisheries scientists, and freshwater anglers to share research findings and to build an understanding of our trout fisheries.

“Ms April Vokey, a leading fisheries conservationist and passionate fly fisher from North America will be the keynote speaker.”

Conference topics will include-spawning success in 12 wild rivers, tagged trout movement in the Delatite River, and how climate change is affecting our trout streams... Information will be provided on the contribution of stocked trout, and discussion on introducing a minimum size for trout in Victoria.

The conference will be held at the Mansfield Performing Arts Centre –9.30am-4.30pm

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided free

Now

Registration for the Conference is free –Contact via www.mansfieldmtbuller.com.au/twt **Want to Know More** – Contact www.vic.gov.au/troutconference

Book Early for this Conference



What a Blast

The Bemm River entrance (Sydenham Inlet) was closed by a large amount of sand and inundation of private land was taking place. Digging by hand was not viable and heavy equipment could not reach the area. To address this challenge explosives were utilised to create a channel from the estuary to the sea allowing water to be released. Parks Victoria, Bemm River community, DELWP, EGCMA, Vic Police, and Fisheries Victoria cooperated on this project. Parks Vic was also involved with the Thurra River, however this estuary was manually dug open by hand.

(Photo and information taken from the East Gippsland District News August 2016)