

**Representing
Victorian
Recreational
Fishers**



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Draft Warrnambool Harbour Master Plan
Warrnambool City Council
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DRAFT WARRNAMBOOL HARBOUR MASTER PLAN

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of VRFish, the peak body representing Victoria's 838,000 recreational fishers. VRFish welcomes the opportunity to provide our submission and represent the views of Victoria's fishing community on this important matter.

Firstly, VRFish must remind the City of Warrnambool of the recommendations and outcomes from the *Western Victoria Boating Coastal Action Plan 2010*. This strategic action plan has assigned Warrnambool as a State Marine Precinct and as a high priority for a safe all-weather harbour. This plan outlines the significant community benefit through such a development with economic benefits to flow to local and regional businesses. It also documents unsafe and degraded infrastructure and that boaters are consciously avoiding Warrnambool for safer launching infrastructure at Apollo Bay and Portland.

For the City of Warrnambool to continually ignore the recommendation of an all-weather safe harbour is disappointing and is not in the best interest for the Warrnambool community and businesses. The need for a safe harbour at Warrnambool is well-documented and has been a long-standing position for VRFish, formed through many years of consultation. During the latest consultation process and our attendance at a public meeting in November we can report that local recreational fishers are frustrated, disillusioned and disappointed with the City of Warrnambool's position on the Harbour Master Plan. The Council's decision to prioritise safer launching facilities over a safe harbour is completely out of step with recreational fisher's needs and expectations.

VRFish fully agrees the existing boat launching facilities are degraded and congestion during peak periods is unacceptable. However, recreational fishers do not want to proceed with extensive and needed upgrades to their facilities without a commitment for an all-weather safe harbour. Wave action that wraps around breakwater and surges towards the boat ramp creates extremely hazardous and dangerous conditions. The *Port of Warrnambool: Safer Boating and Harbour Facility Study (2012)* notes the exposure to wave action is an "immediate constraint to providing safer boating and harbour facilities". Even if the City of

Warrnambool undertakes first class launching, carpark and overflow arrangements the underlying and fundamental problem at the site has not been addressed.

With regards to a user pays approach, we would strongly caution against implementing such a system. Over half of the respondents to the survey do not support such a system. The Victorian boating and fishing community already pay significant fees for boating infrastructure, licensing and education. During consultation for the *Safe and Accessible Waterways Discussion Paper* we have called for a full return of these fees to support our deteriorating boating infrastructure. It is worth noting that 100% of other submissions to the discussion paper also supported our view. If our funds were directed back into infrastructure and other improvements, as these funds were always intended, this would negate the need for any user pays system. In addition, with a construction of a safe harbour there many commercial opportunities that has the potential to generate income for ongoing maintenance and servicing.

Recreational fishers are a significant stakeholder and user group for the Port of Warrnambool. We implore the City of Warrnambool to engage with and take on board local recreational fishers' expertise through this consultation process. Proceeding with a Harbour Master Plan without a commitment for a safe harbour is not supported by our sector and is in stark contradiction with previous planning and studies. If the City of Warrnambool commits to a safe harbour, Option 1 of the Draft Harbour Master Plan is the preferred approach. The dilapidated condition of the Breakwater must also be resolved.

VRFish supports the City of Warrnambool's primary objective of the project to provide safer boating and harbour facilities at the Port of Warrnambool and to maximise the significant tourism and commercial potential of the Harbour. Recreational fishing is estimated to be worth \$7.1 billion to the Victorian economy with recreational fishers on average spending over \$300 per trip. It is our hope that our sector can deliver these economic benefits and prosperity to Warrnambool through the construction of a safe harbour and upgraded facilities. VRFish stands ready to support the City of Warrnambool in promoting the community benefits of safe harbour, attracting required funds, is environmentally sound and meet the future needs of our sector.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. Robert Loats
Chairman
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

22 December 2017