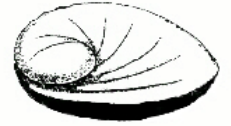




EASTERN ZONE ABALONE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION INC.

Registered No: A0038877D



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5th March 2021

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Submission closing date: 12 March 2021.

RE: Submission from Eastern Zone Abalone Industry Association (EZAIA) - The Fisheries Quota System

INTRODUCTION – HISTORY of the Eastern Zone

The Eastern Zone Abalone Industry Association (EZAIA) is a wild catch abalone industry sector that operates in the Mallacoota region of Victoria. Prior to 1960, little was known in Australia about abalone it was called “muttonfish” and typically overlooked as seafood for more popular choices of oysters or mussels. By the late 1950’s Chinese restaurants in Australia were becoming popular and the Chinese were proficient at turning the tough muscle into tasty morsels and as the Chinese population increased so did demand for the fish and demand for abalone which created export markets.

Mallacoota is a remote, rugged and pristine area on the Victorian coastline that sits half way between Melbourne and Sydney. Demand for abalone saw an influx of divers to Mallacoota in the mid 1960’s. The history of the industry has been captured in a book titled “Head down bum up “the first 22 years 1963 – 1985 compiled and written by Fred and Heidi Ledwell, Fred being a pioneer of the industry.

<https://www.secretreef.com.au/>

EZAIA would like to address the following terms of reference in this submission:

e. whether the current system results in good fishing practice that is ecologically sustainable and economically dynamic, and produces good community outcomes

EZAIA strongly believe that this industry is economically dynamic and combined with good management practices and a co-managed approach with Victorian government fisheries it remains sustainable and viable. “*The Victorian governments’ primary objective for the abalone fishery is to optimise its long-term value for the Victorian community in accordance with the objectives and provisions specified in the Fisheries Act 1995*”.¹

¹ https://vfa.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/341134/Victorian-Wild-Harvest-Abalone-FMP_March-2015.pdf, Pg 3

The Victorian Government introduced Licences in 1966 and gradually the fee was increased, those diving introduced self-imposed bag limits and by 1968 Victoria was split into Western, Central and Eastern zones and by 1968 the Eastern Zone was closed to new entrants. The same year Abalone Fishermen's Co-operative was formed. By 1969 abalone beds were becoming depleted and as a conservation measure the Co-op introduced size grading, paying more for larger abalone. Over the ensuing years, divers were getting the bends, major floods occurred, poachers were getting in on the action and electricity came to Mallacoota.

Between 1972 and 1984 licence fees had increased and Fisheries Management Committee was formed, a processing plant was built, a canning plant was established and in 1984 the co-op introduced a transferability of licences in a 2 for 1 but up scheme. The selling price for a licence was approximately \$80,000 which cost divers around \$160,000 to buy into the industry. This resulted in 23 licensed divers operating out of Mallacoota and to this day it remains a limited entry fishery and there are still only 23 Abalone Fishery Access Licences in this region.

Quota management was first introduced in 1988, with the TACs for each zone having remained constant to the present.² The commercial fishery commenced in 1962 and during its relatively short history has been subject to fairly intensive management in the form of legal minimum lengths (LMLs), zonation of the fishery (Central, Eastern and Western), limited entry and quotas. As a consequence, the fishery has been relatively stable and remunerative. The catching sector has developed effective fishing practices and equipment, and efficiently provides a product that is one of very few that is handpicked from the ocean floor.³

Victoria is home to one of the most sustainable wild-catch abalone fisheries in the world, with a long history of success since being established early in the 1960's.⁴ The Eastern Zone together with the Victorian Government hold an annual Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) workshop to review the science, season catch and Fishery Independent Surveys. This co-management approach allows input from the industry as each Spatial Management Unit (SMU) is assessed. Once the TACC has been carried out (usually three months before the end of the season) this allows time for the Victorian Government to provide recommendations for the Minister to set the annual quota limits.

Abalone abundance data has been collected since 1992 and these figures are incorporated into the annual TACC to review and set the quota amount for each reef code. Victorian abalone stocks are among the few worldwide that have yielded sustainable wild harvests.⁵

a) Good fishing practice that is ecologically sustainable with an economic dynamic that produces good community outcomes:

A comprehensive study of Victoria's fisheries and aquaculture: economic social contributions carried out by University of Technology Sydney, May 2020 reported that the far east region of Victoria was the most productive fishing region on Victoria.⁶ This study found that the far east region did contribute to the wellbeing of regional communities and to Victoria in five ways:

² <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/8f9a8a8a-0205-48b4-a001-048c0e324815/files/abalone.pdf> pg 8

³ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/8f9a8a8a-0205-48b4-a001-048c0e324815/files/abalone.pdf> pg 9

⁴ https://vfa.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/341134/Victorian-Wild-Harvest-Abalone-FMP_March-2015.pdf

⁵ https://vfa.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/341134/Victorian-Wild-Harvest-Abalone-FMP_March-2015.pdf Pg 10

⁶ [https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-](https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/23369%20FASS%20Victoria%27s%20Far-east%20Fisheries%20Summary_web_FA.pdf)

[07/23369%20FASS%20Victoria%27s%20Far-east%20Fisheries%20Summary_web_FA.pdf](https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/23369%20FASS%20Victoria%27s%20Far-east%20Fisheries%20Summary_web_FA.pdf) Flyer with infographic: Fishing Far East

- Economic diversity and resilience
- Food supply
- Tourism and recreation
- Environmental health
- Social fabric

The same report highlighted that the far east region is the most productive fishing region in Victoria and the fishing industry built the communities of Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota.

A snapshot of the far east region listed it as the most productive fishing region in Victoria and that Mallacoota built the fishing industry which today remains economically dependent on fishing. The far east region contributed \$76 million to the Victorian economy and accounted for 810 full time jobs. *Industry supports a range of business and job opportunities, from on-the-boat work through to businesses that service the industry, along with supply chain, tourism and hospitality operations.*

81% of residents believe that the industry supports their local economy and provides jobs.

88% of Victorian tourism operators surveyed say the industry adds to the character of towns.

Data collected by the industry helps manage commercial and recreational fisheries sustainably

82% of Victorian fish stocks assessed are classified as 'sustainable 'or 'recovering'.

C) whether the current system disempowers small fishers and benefits large interest groups

The Mallacoota abalone fishery pioneers founded the community which was built from a boom in fishing activity and the “community infrastructure” was established by fishing families. ⁷ *“When the guys came here in the 60’s there was only about 100 people living here.....within a few years there was 120 divers, 80 boats....crew, families, kids. They built the tennis courts, they built the golf club. They formed the soccer club, the sailing club because they were young active people.....What’s left behind as a result of that is there’s a legacy here from those decades that’s continued. So now you’ve got second generation (fishers) and their kids and on on....it just goes on....”*

EZAIA contend that most of these pioneers who founded the industry still retain quota licences, they are relatively small quota holders and while they are not able to actively fish now, still employ divers and deckhands on contract basis to collect fish for their licences. Access licences and quota units are transferable and can be leased or sold to licence and non-licence holders. Without these pioneers embarking on self-regulation and introduction of size limits which continue to this day – this fishery may not exist.

EZAIA present that instead of disempowering small fishers the Eastern Zone Abalone fishers have followed the principles of intergenerational equity under the Commonwealth Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and is the generation ensuring that the health and diversity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations. ⁸

This is evidenced in a report by ABARES Agricultural Commodities: March 2019 which reported that Australia produces around 55% of global wild caught abalone whose production fell between 2006 – 2016 from 9,229 tonnes to 6,446 tonnes driven by declining global wild-catch stocks and restrictive quotas. ⁹

Victoria.

⁷ <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/uts-fass-victoria-fisheries-aquaculture-report.pdf> page 161

⁸ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/5d70283b-3777-442e-b395-b0a22ba1b273/files/02-objectives.pdf> Pg 23

⁹ https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/sitecollectiondocuments/abares/agriculture-commodities/AgCommodities201903_FisheriesOutlook_v1.0.0.pdf Pg 6 (of 92 total report)

In conclusion the current state of management and quota setting, Australian wild-caught abalone are expected to remain stable and constrained by conservatively set allowable catch.

EZAIA welcomes the opportunity to be able to make this submission on behalf of its members and would be willing to appear before your committee to make our case and provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely

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