

Overview of the Port Phillip Bay Commercial Wild Catch Fishery

Commercial fishing in Port Phillip Bay (PPB)

Commercial fishers in PPB operate under the authority of a Western Port/Port Phillip Bay Fishery Access Licence. The total number of these licences is capped at forty-two. The existing licences can be transferred to new fishers but no additional licences can be issued. PPB commercial fishers are authorised to use a range of equipment types including longlines, mesh nets and haul seines to catch a variety of fish species such as sardines, King George whiting and snapper. These fishers provide fresh, high quality and sustainably harvested seafood to Victorian consumers, many of whom either choose not to or may be unable to participate in recreational fishing.

Annual commercial catch and value

The total catch by PPB fishers averages around 400 tonnes per annum (Fig. 1) and the total value of production is approximately \$4 million annually.

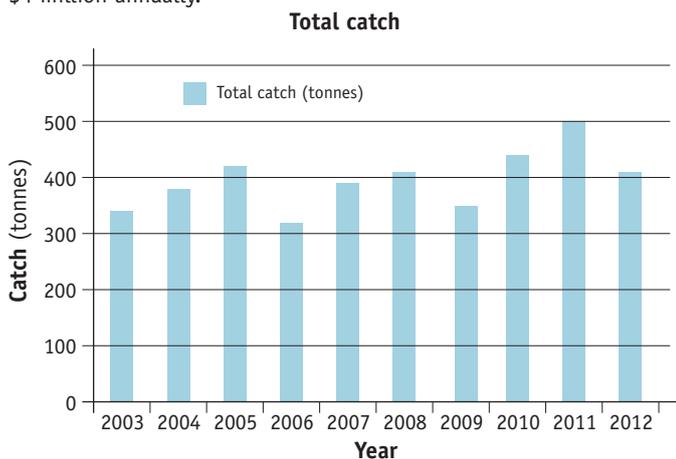


Figure 1. Annual catch of all species by commercial PPB fishers between 2003 and 2012.

The main species taken over the last ten years by PPB commercial fishers in order of decreasing annual catch are snapper, King George whiting, southern calamari, Australian salmon, southern garfish and rock flathead.



Image: Warren Knowler

Transfer of effort to PPB following the ban on netting in Western Port

Netting in Western Port was banned in 2007 for the purpose of establishing a recreational fishing haven. Some fishers shifted their effort from Western Port to PPB following the ban. However, the average number of days commercially fished has dropped by twenty per cent over the last ten years in PPB.

Controls on licence holders

PPB commercial fishers are subject to controls on fishing equipment under the *Fisheries Regulations 2009* and in some cases voluntarily limit their activities during peak periods to minimise interactions with the public. Many PPB commercial fishers operate in accordance with the *Victorian Bays and Inlets Fisheries Association Environmental Management System* and the *Victorian Fishery Association Resource Management Code of Practice for Commercial Haul Seine Fishing in Port Phillip Bay*.





Image: Richard Rogala

Recreational fishing in PPB

PPB is highly valued as a destination for recreational fishers, providing a wide range of fishing opportunities to keen anglers. So popular is recreational fishing in PPB that on an annual basis its catch may exceed that of the commercial sector. For example, the recreational harvest of snapper is four times larger than the commercial catch. To better understand the extent of the recreational catch, Fisheries Victoria is planning to undertake studies to further quantify the recreational harvest of key fish species.

Sustainability of the resource

Both recreational and commercial snapper, King George whiting and calamari fishing in PPB have been performing very well in recent years. The most recent Fisheries Victoria stock assessments of key species indicate that PPB fish stocks are in good condition and are sustainably fished. The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation report *Status of Australian Fish Stocks Report 2012* lists western Victorian snapper and King George whiting stocks as sustainable. Commercial fisheries for calamari, silver trevally, King George whiting and snapper in PPB have been assessed as sustainable by the Australian Conservation Foundation's *Sustainable Australian Seafood Assessment Program*.

Snapper spawning and recruitment

Good recruitment in the snapper fishery depends in large part on the number of adult fish as well as the survival of larvae after spawning. This means that environmental factors are highly significant. Research by DEPI indicates that snapper recruitment in PPB has generally been below average over recent years, suggesting that future catches are likely to moderate in the shorter term. However, Fisheries Victoria's most recent monitoring shows that the 2012/13 spawning season was successful for snapper, which is a positive sign for the fishery in coming years.

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King George whiting harvest

King George whiting catches in PPB fluctuate in response to short and longer term cycles in westerly winds and currents in the coastal waters of Bass Strait. Seagrass habitat is also important for juveniles as they enter the bay. The combined effect of these factors is the fluctuation of King George Whiting on an 10 -12 year cycle. (Fig.2)

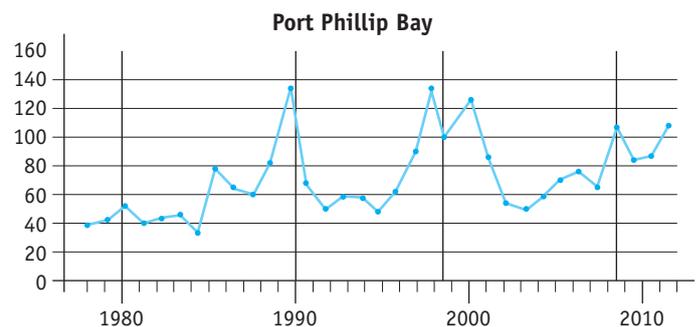


Figure 2. Cyclical changes in King George whiting commercial catches

Seagrass

Seagrass habitats change naturally and there have been documented declines in several areas of PPB. Nutrients, fresh water, levels of sediment, shading by macroalgae influence seagrass abundance and distribution in PPB. Seine netting by commercial fishers has been found to have minimal effect on seagrass.



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