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TO: The Project Manager VRHS  
Catchment & Water Division  
Department of Natural Resources and Environment  
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**Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body (VR Fish)**  
**Submission on the draft Victorian River Health Strategy**

VRFish, the Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak-Body recognises the value of a healthy aquatic environment for the sustainability of recreational angling in this State.

Recreational angling is a multi million-dollar industry and the maintenance and enhancement of river health will have a significant economic impact on many regional areas around Victoria by enhancing recreational fishing opportunities.

VRFish is supportive of the development of the Victorian River Health Strategy and appreciates the opportunity to be involved in the reference group assisting with the development of the strategy.

Without going into detail on the draft document there are several basic issues VRFish submits for consideration:

**Environmental Flows:**

In recent years (partly because of drought) government has focused on the economic worth of water to the agricultural sector. There needs to be a broader assessment of the value of water for environmental use, not only its value in sustaining aquatic life but its value for community recreational use.

The VRFish view is that it appears there is minimal emphasis on enforcement of environmental flows. Regional Water Authorities are focussed on the "dollar return" and not maintenance of our aquatic environment. VRFish

would like to see the Regional Catchment Management Authorities managing stream flows and water allocation around the state.

VRFish seeks to be consulted when Bulk Entitlements and Stream Flow Management Plans are being developed.

**Introduced Species:**

VRFish places a very high value on the preservation and enhancement of our Native Fish population but also places a high value on the introduced salmonid species. In our cooler highland and southern flowing streams, the trout is the most highly sort after species by many thousands of anglers.

We are pleased to see that the value of some introduced fish species are recognised in the Vision in section 4.1 of the strategy. The value of various fish species in some watersheds will obviously be debated from time to time. VRFish would ask to be included on working groups when these issues arise.

**Access:**

With increasing populations and a greater recreational demand on our Waterways, VRFish believes access rights are an important issue. VRFish believes that recreational fishing in general has no negative impact on the environment, apart from the actions of a minority. VRFish is pro-active in enhancing recreational fishing through improved access, so when issues arise that may limit this access VRFish would seek to be involved in discussions where access may create conflict.

**Special Management Areas:**

It has been suggested in New South Wales that some sections of streams may be set aside for preservation of endangered species or rehabilitation and access limited. While not opposed to this as a management tool, should this occur in Victoria, VRFish would seek to be involved in the decision making process to achieve the best possible outcome for all user groups.

**Regional Management:**

VRFish is a regionally based organization and has representatives in all areas of Victoria. Our regional representatives, in most cases, have an intimate knowledge of the recreational, cultural and environmental value of their local waterways. They are also very much aware of the risks within the catchments to the sustainability of those values. VRFish sees this as a valuable resource that could be accessed by government agencies involved in the business of protecting and enhancing Victorian streams. VRFish would ask that the Victorian Government recognise and utilise this resource, and involve VRFish in the management strategy at every possible occasion.

VRFish commends the Victorian Government on the initiative of the Victorian River Health Strategy and looks forward to on ongoing involvement in its evolution and implementation.



Patrick Washington OAM  
Chairman