



2024-2030 Strategic Plan



Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture, and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples, and as the custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise the strength of Aboriginal people, Traditional Owners and their communities, and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people to Victorian life, through their daily work, their application of Aboriginal knowledge and practice and at key events. We recognise how this enriches us all.

We recognise that Aboriginal cultures and communities are diverse and should be celebrated. We acknowledge that the land and water is of spiritual, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, guaranteeing equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

As part of the Victorian Government, we have distinct legislative obligations to Victorian Traditional Owner groups related to cultural and natural heritage, that are paramount in our responsibilities in managing Victoria's resources in partnership with Traditional Owners.



Introduction

From our WIRFAB Leaders

The Women in Recreational Fishing and Boating (WIRFAB) Network started with humble beginnings responding to a survey conducted in 2017 which identified a need for a supportive space for women to share knowledge, stories and skills about fishing.

Since being established as the Women in Recreational Fishing (WIRF) Network on International Women's Day in 2018, our community has grown rapidly. In March 2023, the network expanded to become the WIRFAB Network to acknowledge and support women in recreational boating.

Our experience in WIRFAB has been empowering and inspiring. We have created a community that is vibrant and keen to grow their fishing knowledge through fishing and boating clinics, information sessions, leadership programs, an annual conference and a dedicated website full of useful resources. Now, we are excited to see our next chapter outlined in this WIRFAB Strategy and look forward to increasing the value created for women in fishing and boating.



Jo Larkin
WIRFAB Leader



Cara Cummings
WIRFAB Leader



Amanda Keilar
WIRFAB Leader



From our VFA Leaders

The VFA manages Victoria's diverse freshwater and marine fisheries so they are healthy, productive and sustainable for the benefit of current and future generations. We also create opportunities for all Victorians to learn about and engage sustainably in recreational fishing and boating, generating widespread community health and wellbeing benefits.

As part of our work, the VFA is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for women in fishing and boating. We recognise the numerous benefits that these activities offer, including physical health, mental well-being, social connections and career opportunities. By encouraging more women to participate, we aim to create a more diverse and dynamic fishing and boating community.

The number of women in recreational fishing has increased since the Victorian Government established the WIRF, now WIRFAB, Network for female fishers. Almost 20 per cent of our marine licence holders are women - more than 87,000 women – and we are committed to growing these numbers. As part of our commitment, we will support the WIRFAB Network to grow with more women engaging in these outdoor activities and pursuing career pathways in the fishing and boating sectors.

Through this Strategy and other initiatives, the VFA and the Victorian Government will continue to provide opportunities, resources, training and events designed specifically to support and empower women to engage in fishing and boating. Our initiatives include workshops led by experienced female fishers, leadership programs and collaborations with industry stakeholders.

Growing the next generation of female fishers and boaters is central to our strategy. Through the VFA's work with primary schools all over Victoria, we are continuously bringing the joy and science of fishing to the classroom, inspiring future anglers, chefs, fishing researchers and policy makers. In addition, the Victorian Government has delivered the Little Angler Kits initiative ensuring that every Grade 5 student in Victoria has a fishing rod and equipment to begin a healthy, lifelong hobby. For the girls who continue with the activity, that's an entire cohort of future women in fishing.

We are also focused on promoting safety, accessibility and awareness in recreational fishing and boating for women. By investing in these areas, we can create a more equitable and engaging environment where women feel confident and encouraged to explore the joys of recreational and career fishing and boating.

This Strategy helps us foster and grow a diverse community within which female fishers and boaters learn, belong, thrive, and enjoy all that outdoor recreation and careers in Victoria have to offer.



Gus Dear
VFA Board Chair



Wambui Migwe
VFA Board Director
WIRFAB Champion



Travis Dowling
VFA CEO



The Women in Recreational Fishing and Boating (WIRFAB) Network

The beginning

The Women in Recreational Fishing Network began in 2018. It started with a small number of like-minded women with a shared aim to increase the inclusion and upskilling of female fishers. From there, it expanded to an online community providing women a space to learn more about fishing and now boating. To broaden the scope, early 2023 saw the addition of boating to the network's core mission and the name was changed to the Women in Recreational Fishing and Boating (WIRFAB) Network.

The role of the VFA

The WIRFAB Network is supported by the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA). This online community and the general running of the network is coordinated by the VFA and guided by the WIRFAB Leadership Team. A number of VFA personnel will work with the WIRFAB Leadership Team to promote and support the WIRFAB Network.

WIRFAB Leaders

The WIRFAB Leadership Team is made up of women from the community. The main roles of the team include guiding and advising on what is needed to pave the way for females in this industry and to inspire and empower other women to take up and enjoy fishing and boating.

Our actions so far

Over the first five years, the WIRFAB Network has grown and now includes:

- A dedicated online community – Facebook group (Women in Rec Fishing and Boating online community) and a website (wirfab.com.au)
- A broader social media presence, particularly on Facebook and Instagram, that provides tailored information to women across Victoria and further afield.
- The community-based “WIRFAB Locals” program where people can meet up and go fishing together and that is currently active in 5 areas - Bass Coast/Gippsland, Metro, North East, Mornington and Geelong/ Surf Coast/Bellarine.
- An annual “WIRFAB Leadership Program” that has resulted in 42 Victorian women taking up professional development opportunities and advancing their leadership skills, then going on to represent the VFA and WIRFAB at industry events and advocating for female fishers and boaters needs. Some participants have also gained careers in the industry, including representing women in popular fishing media and working in tackle stores.
- A variety of events held across Victoria each year to improve female inclusion and to provide a platform for female fishers and boaters to be heard.



The Numbers



4,300+

members in the WIRFAB Facebook group



1,400+

followers on Instagram



300

participants in the WIRFAB Locals program



42

Victorian women have accessed the WIRFAB Leadership Program



120

attendees at the inaugural WIRFAB conference



100

other WIRFAB learning and networking events



Why a WIRFAB Strategy is important

The WIRFAB Network has built a reputable, recognisable presence and voice in the fishing and boating industry, with the goal of increasing female inclusion, and creating opportunities and improving outcomes for female fishers and boaters.

To achieve this, we have developed an action plan that continues to identify and address the barriers and challenges. The outcomes from challenging these barriers will ultimately contribute to creating more opportunities for women in this industry.

A survey undertaken in 2017 by the VFA to understand the barriers to fishing for women indicated a strong need to create a supportive space for women to share knowledge, stories and skills about fishing, hence the creation and success of the WIRFAB Network online community.

However, there is still currently less women engaged in recreational fishing and boating than men and there remain some important barriers for female participation that will be addressed in this strategy. As a basis for continued progress, the WIRFAB Network has developed this strategy to guide our direction and next set of actions through to 2030.

Opportunities

There are several stakeholders and organisations prioritising gender parity in the fishing and boating industries, with the WIRFAB Network positioned well to take advantage of social progress. New requirements regarding gender equality also offer excellent opportunities for women in fishing and boating to be better represented within this field.

With the addition of boating to WIRFAB's core purpose and the network striving to be more inclusive, the opportunity for the WIRFAB network has expanded and includes:

- A wider audience reach for WIRFAB activities, increasing support, participation and improving skill levels.
- Collaboration and information sharing opportunities with interstate and international female fishing communities.
- The opportunity to diversify the group through learning about the importance of fishing and the practices of different cultures, for example to learn from Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians and immigrant groups.
- The ability to diversify the group through the inclusion of non-angling boaters; and
- Better outcomes for female fishers who also have an interest in boating or vice versa.



The current active WIRFAB leadership group are highly skilled and passionate advocates for the Network. They have skills and a support network that will be invaluable in pursuing our objectives.

The WIRFAB Network has strong, established partnerships with the VFA (including its Better Boating Victoria (BBV) division), the Victorian fishing and boating community, industry stakeholders including the tackle industry, boating industry and the education sector.

Opportunities exist to specifically engage with organisations such as the Boating Industry Association of Victoria, for example, which is developing mentoring opportunities for women in boating and skills programs.

Challenges

A survey of the WIRFAB Network online community in 2022 identified that barriers to recreational fishing and boating include:

- Lack of time, including limitations due to family and parenting commitments
- Lack of knowledge and/or confidence to learn/seek out knowledge
- Experience of negative attitudes towards women in fishing
- Limited facilities/amenities in preferred locations
- Concerns for personal safety; and
- Lack of equal representation in fishing media.

Supporting this, the National Recreational Fishing Survey identified that the majority of fishers fished less often in the last year than they wanted to, with the most common reasons including:

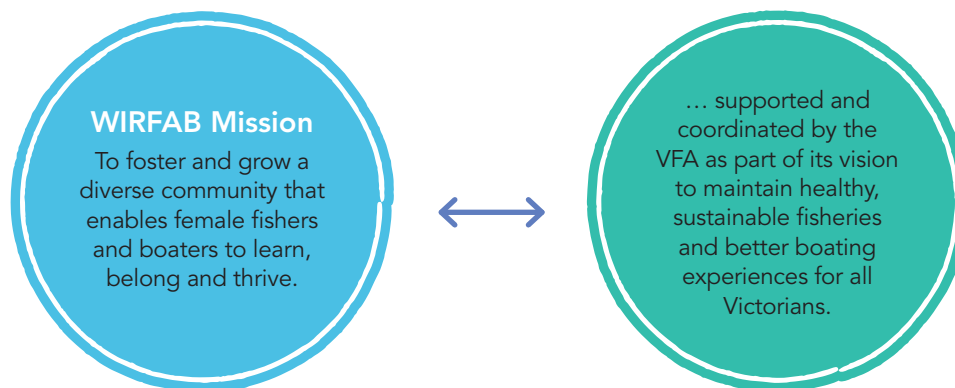
- Work and home commitments
- Lacking an available fishing companion; and
- Poor environmental conditions.

While such data is useful to underpin our planning relating to fishing, there is a need for also improving the understanding around the needs of female boaters.

There is also a need for greater diversity within the current WIRFAB Network to ensure female boaters are well represented.



The WIRFAB Strategy



This strategy aims to deliver the WIRFAB Mission through education and participation programs, the fostering of both online and in-person communities and by increasing female representation at both the community and industry levels to advocate for women across these important industries and recreational pursuits.

WIRFAB's strategic priorities

1. Education
2. Community building
3. Advocacy and Consultation
4. Participation
5. Gathering information

Implementation and Reporting

The VFA will work hand-in-hand with the WIRFAB Leaders to drive implementation of priority actions. To monitor progress and evaluate the success of the WIRFAB Strategy, an annual implementation plan will be developed that sets out the detail of actions to be undertaken each year.

Reporting on progress will be provided to:

- The WIRFAB Leadership Team and the VFA Executive Team each 6 months; and
- The WIRFAB online community, the Minister's Office and the VFA Board annually, as well as being included in the VFA Annual Report.



Our Priorities and Actions

Priority 1: Education

To continue to provide opportunities to empower and inspire women to be more confident in their fishing and boating ability. This will be supported by the following actions:

Action	Output	Key Performance Measures
Immediate priorities (2024 onwards)		
Identify pathways to engage and support the development of female fishers and boaters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold roundtables enabling WIRFAB Leaders to interact directly with fishing and boating industry stakeholders to pursue opportunities for increasing female involvement in the sector. • Facilitate networking sessions with industry. • Strategic partnerships formed with industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual or in-person roundtables held at least once per year. • At least one networking events held each year. • Host and promote a skills/contacts directory in the WIRFAB website. • Promote industry opportunities (industry committees and relevant boards) on the WIRFAB website. • Work with Boating Industry Association Victoria (BIAV) to promote women in maritime/boating career opportunities.
Deliver in-person and virtual educational and social events for female fishers and boaters across Victoria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver annual fishing basic skills clinics. • Deliver annual trailer and vessel handling clinics. • Deliver virtual check in sessions in the online community. • Deliver a WIRFAB conference every 2 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host at least two sessions per type of event each year. • Deliver a WIRFAB conference in 2025, 2027, 2029.
Create, promote and maintain digital resources (social media and website) to foster education and collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educational and promotional information to WIRFAB members. • Create and promote educational articles, videos and social media posts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate and distribute a quarterly WIRFAB e-newsletter. • Upload at least one educational article and/or video each month to the WIRFAB website. • Upload at least one social media post to the WIRFAB and VFA social media channels each month.
Future priorities (2028 onwards)		
Create mentorship programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a program to identify and foster new, young WIRFAB leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an annual skills and leadership development program for young females (for example, between the ages of 12-17) with a view to them becoming future WIRFAB leaders.

Priority 2: Community Building

To support and upskill female fishers and boaters by fostering an active, collaborative community. This will be underpinned by the following actions:

Action	Output	Key Performance Measures
Immediate priorities (2024 onwards)		
Develop strategic partnerships with key fishing and boating organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with VRFish and BIAV to promote women in fishing and boating. Collaborate with relevant industry bodies to promote 'female friendly tackle stores'. Explore how men could be encouraged to be WIRFAB advocates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New partnerships formed with VRFish, BIAV and other key stakeholder groups and generating tangible benefits for female fishers and boaters.
Develop strategic partnerships with cultural groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with cultural groups and seek to learn about their fishing knowledge and fishing cultural practices including, for example, inviting Traditional Owners to share knowledge of fishing practices and roles of Aboriginal women in fishing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New partnerships formed with cultural groups generating a wider understanding and diversifying the sense of belonging for everyone in the community by sharing case studies/stories from these cultural groups.
Foster and grow online communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online WIRFAB platforms promoted. WIRFAB and its online platforms promoted at relevant industry events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an annual skills and leadership development program for young females (for example, between the ages of 12-17) with a view to them becoming future WIRFAB leaders.
Foster and grow the 'WIRFAB Locals' program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities pursued to grow and strengthen the 'WIRFAB Locals' program, including through grant opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased membership in the WIRFAB Locals groups.
Collaborate with women in other fishing and boating groups/programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify new groups of women fishers and boaters and pursue opportunities for collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships formed with new groups of women interested in fishing and boating.



Priority 3: Advocacy and Consultation

To improve the representation of women in fishing and boating industries towards gender parity. This will be supported by the following actions:

Action	Output	Key Performance Measures
Immediate priorities (2024 onwards)		
Grow the WIRFAB Leaders group to improve opportunities for WIRFAB to act as advocates and representatives within fishing and boating sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to deliver an annual WIRFAB Leaders intake. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New WIRFAB Leaders provided with the opportunity to participate in a leadership program at the annual Australian Fishing Trade Association Tackle Show. Increase the number of WIRFAB Leaders, including introduction of new leaders from locations where WIRFAB leaders were previously under-represented.
Remunerate WIRFAB Leaders for work they do as advocates and representatives within industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a remuneration structure and process for WIRFAB Leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WIRFAB leaders are remunerated for the services they provide.
Support and increase female representation in VFA communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create regular content to share on VFA communication platforms on a monthly basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one new post promoting WIRFAB and featuring women fishers and boaters featured on VFA communication channels (social media) each month.
Upskill WIRFAB Leaders with industry-relevant professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue training opportunities to promote professional development for WIRFAB Leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a WIRFAB handbook to support WIRFAB Leaders as they undertake relevant roles. WIRFAB Leaders participate in relevant training and professional development opportunities.
Support women to gain careers in fishing and boating industries and to increase female representation in decision-making processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and advocate for greater representation of women in fishing and boating careers and processes including, for example, in media, industry committees and boards. Industry partnerships with aquaculture facilities, commercial fishers and fishing charter operators to understand their operations and explore entry opportunities for women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing female representation in fishing and boating careers and decision-making processes such as media roles, industry committees and boards. Tours to established commercial operations undertaken.
Seek improvements in facilities and services that will benefit women fishers and boaters and foster new women into these pursuits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for improved facilities for female fishers and boaters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved facilities for female fishers and boaters established.

Priority 4: Participation

To increase participation rates by engaging and upskilling female fishers and boaters. This will be underpinned by the following actions:

Action	Output	Key Performance Measures
Future priorities (2026 onwards)		
Identify pathways to engage and support diverse female groups in fishing and boating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite members from the online community to be a part of a reference group to share ideas on how to engage and support the development of female fishers and boaters from diverse backgrounds. • Identify and work with diverse female groups, including from culturally diverse groups, to promote fishing and boating to females. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference group established. • Industry stakeholders and cultural groups introduced to this reference group to create change and opportunity for all female fishers and boaters. • Pathways established to engage and support diverse female populations. • Feature diverse female populations in online content through all WIRFAB and VFA social media channels.
Collaborate with industry stakeholders and cultural groups to provide female-friendly fishing and boating clinics and other opportunities to upskill their fishing and boating knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with industry stakeholders and cultural groups undertaken and priorities for upskilling opportunities identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upskilling opportunities conducted with significant participation rates.



Priority 5: Gathering Information

To better understand the barriers to increasing women participation in fishing and boating, and to monitor and measure the delivery of this strategy. The VFA will monitor progress annually using measurable outcomes such as survey data. The VFA will also seek to further quantify the number of female fishers and boaters, with year one providing a benchmark for comparison with future years.

Action	Output	Key Performance Measures
Future priorities (2025 onwards)		
Improved data and understanding regarding the number of female fishers and boaters, and their needs, behaviours and challenges in pursuing fishing and boating activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with existing survey and data managers, including within the VFA, to extract improved data regarding female fishers and boaters, and their needs, behaviours and challenges. • Initiate additional surveys or other data collection as needed to achieve an improved snapshot of the sector including the culture within angling clubs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved data available annually regarding female fishers and boaters, and their needs, behaviours and challenges.







wirfab.com.au
vfa.vic.gov.au