

**Fishers for homes for fish**

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The Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute (MAFRI) has secured funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for an innovative community based monitoring project called "Fishers for homes for fish".

This project recognises that healthy fish habitats play an important role in maintaining sustainable fisheries. In order to improve fisheries through habitat management, an improved understanding of the relationships between fish and their habitat is required.

A key focus of this project is the identification of fish habitats and any existing or potential threats to these. However, unlike many traditional scientific studies, this project draws on the experience, local knowledge and enthusiasm of the fishing community. Fishers are a great source of knowledge on fish behaviour, reproduction and habitat. This project uses this collective knowledge of fishers to identify the local condition of fish habitat and the causes of habitat degradation.

"Fishers for homes for fish" will initially be a 12-month project that will be designed, trialed and evaluated in three key areas in Victoria - the Hopkins estuary in Warrnambool, the Werribee River and Western Port Bay. A series of workshops will be held in these regions to consult with fishers on the suitability of the techniques and to gather other ideas for the program. The intention is to provide volunteer participants with field diaries in which they can record key information on fish habitat and existing or potential threats. It is likely that this project will link into the existing recreational fishing diary program that is already proving successful as a community based project.

This project will contribute to the protection and conservation of fisheries resources, habitats and ecosystems. It will also help to develop positive links between scientists and the community and ultimately raise the feelings ownership of the local community towards the marine environment. The information collected during this project will allow scientists to identify potential problems, assess options and implement solutions for the sustainable management of fish habitat in Victoria

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