

GOOD CATCHES AHEAD FOR TWO OF THE BAY'S MOST POPULAR FISH

Principal researcher, Greg Jenkins

Scientists at Queenscliff's Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute (MAFRI) are predicting good catches of King George whiting and snapper over the next few years.

Scientists at MAFRI have been closely monitoring the young of many popular fish species in Port Phillip Bay for a number of years. Larval and young fish are collected, sorted and counted each year to provide fisheries managers with an indication of the potential future catches of selected species. Information on catches of undersized fish is also collected from commercial and recreational fishers.

Dr. Greg Jenkins, Program Leader at MAFRI says that the information collected from the fish surveys has been crucial to gaining a better understanding of the status of King George whiting and snapper stocks in the bay.

“This year, a lot of undersized King George whiting have been caught in the bay by professional and amateur fishers”, explained Greg. “This is what we predicted back in 2000 when we caught large number of larval whiting coming into the bay”.

These large numbers of undersized whiting will reach the legal minimum size of 27cm by next year, and that's good news for whiting fishers. MAFRI scientists are predicting a decent period of good catches for King George whiting next year and for about the next three years.

This year's fish surveys have also found a much greater normal number of baby snapper in Port Phillip Bay. “The small snapper we are catching in our trawl surveys are about 120mm long”, explained Greg. “These snapper are about one year old and were spawned during the summer of 2001”.

Even though it will take a few years for these snapper to reach catchable size, scientists are predicting that there will be some good snapper fishing in the bay in years to come.

The MAFRI research, funded by Fisheries Victoria, is showing that the survival of baby fish is of paramount importance to the future of recreational and commercial fisheries. “We can make good predictions about future fish catches based on the numbers of baby fish that we catch from year to year”, explained Greg. “Ultimately, the protection of the habitats on which these baby fish depend is critical to their future”.