

# **Suggested Code of Practice for Recreational Divers and Fishermen**

The activities of recreational divers and fishermen pose a risk of spreading the virus in the marine environment. The number of individuals that take part in recreational diving and fishing is significant and it is clear that this sector needs protocols to raise awareness of bio-security issues and minimise the risk of groups or individuals inadvertently transferring the virus.

This Code of Practice was developed by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) during discussions with the commercial abalone industry. The purpose of this Code of Practice is to minimise the risk of the virus being spread between management zones within Victoria and interstate by human related activity.

There has been at least 2 incidents that have seen the virus first appear at locations where there is land based access to the coast.

***To be effective, this protocol must be communicated to recreational divers and fishermen through a comprehensive community engagement campaign.***

## **Standard Operating Procedures for Recreational Divers and Fishermen**

This protocol provides basic information on how recreational divers and fishermen can identify and report abalone that have been affected by the disease. It also provides guidance on decontaminating vessels, equipment and personnel.

### **1. Identifying and reporting abalone viral ganglioneuritis**

It is vital that recreational divers and fishermen can identify abalone that could be infected with abalone viral ganglioneuritis and report that information through appropriate communication channels. This information will be used by Government Agencies to respond quickly and effectively to an outbreak of abalone viral ganglioneuritis in the wild in areas where it may otherwise have gone unrecorded.

#### **1.1 Identification of infected abalone.**

Abalone viral ganglioneuritis causes damage to the nerve tissues of abalone (the ganglion) and results in paralysis and death in most cases. The virus seems to occur most often where there are dense populations of abalone, but other stress factors such as high water temperatures, spawning or the presence of other disease agents may pre-dispose abalone to becoming infected or showing clinical signs of the disease. Infected abalone are lethargic and may have enlarged mouth-parts and a curled foot (Appendix I). In the case of disease caused by the virus, the radula (a band of sharp hooked teeth) may protrude from the mouth. When clinically affected by the virus, the abalone are weak and are easily removed or fall off the substrate.

## 1.2 Reporting the virus.

If recreational divers and fishermen encounter abalone that they suspect may be infected with the virus they should take the following action:

1. Collect a sample of the suspect abalone and immediately cease fishing.
2. Place the sample in a sealed plastic bag, label and keep on ice (if possible).
3. Call the Disease Watch Hotline (Telephone 1800 675 888) or Fish Reporting Hotline 13FISH (133474) and VADA on 0418 292 004
4. When making the call it would be good if you could provide the following information:
  - GPS Co-ordinates of the reef and/or full description of the area where the abalone was found (including depth of water);
  - Contact details of diver or fishermen.
  - Basis for suspecting disease (clinical signs, number of dead or dying abalone).
5. A Fisheries Officer will be in contact to collect the sample.
6. The Diagnostic Laboratory at DPI Attwod (475-485 Mickleham Road, Attwood) prefers to receive chilled, live moribund abalone. If delivery time is more than a few hours abalone should be fixed with 10% seawater formalin. Alternatively, frozen abalone will be accepted.

## 2. Decontamination Procedures

Key areas that need to be addressed to minimise the risk of disease transfer through recreational diving and fishing activities include:

- Decontamination of vessels, wetsuits, dive equipment, catch bags, boxes and people with soapy freshwater.
- Appropriate disposal of shells, meat and gut.

This SOP is principally aimed at recreational divers and fishermen that have been in areas or zones that have a history of infection with the virus and who may move vessels and equipment outside the zone. However, it is also applicable to all recreational divers and fishermen.

***It is important to note that should you find yourself in an area that you suspect has the virus in it, you should not leave this area and go diving or fishing in another area. This could lead to the further spreading of the virus.***

### 2.1 Decontamination of vessels.

1. On return to shore, the vessel should be removed from the water and hosed down, preferably with freshwater and detergent to remove organic matter from inside and outside of the vessel. Clean the vessel away from the water's edge so that soapy water drains onto land and not into waterways.
2. Suitable detergents include truckwash and boatwash compounds that are made by a variety of manufacturers.
3. If you live or have accommodation in the area, decontamination can be done when you return home.
4. If you are from another area and intend to take the vessel into waters outside of the zone in which you were fishing, the vessel can be taken to a car wash or service station with washdown facilities.

## **2.2 Decontamination of wetsuits and other dive equipment.**

1. Wetsuits should be washed with a specialised wetsuit wash preparation and freshwater, but if they are not readily available a mild liquid soap or shampoo will suffice.
2. Tanks, buoyancy vests, regulators and masks that have not come in contact with abalone can be washed down with soapfree freshwater.
3. Equipment that has come into contact with abalone (such as catch bags, gloves, knives and measuring devices) should be soaked in a bin containing soapy freshwater for 30 minutes and then rinsed.
4. All equipment should be allowed to dry before re-use.

## **2.3 Decontamination of people.**

1. After diving for abalone, ensure that all people that have come in contact with abalone wash their hands with soap and water.
2. Spray waterproof clothing with soapy freshwater and rinse, leave in the sun to dry.
3. On return home, ensure that clothes are washed with laundry detergent.

## **2.4 Appropriate disposal of shells and viscera.**

1. Abalone may only be shucked when the vessel returns to land.
2. Under no circumstances should shells or viscera be dumped in the sea. This is especially important if the abalone are moved to another area when landed.
3. Take your abalone catch home and dispose of the waste with your household rubbish.
4. Under no circumstances should abalone viscera be used as fishing bait.

# Recreational Bio-Security Summary

## Protocols

- If you find yourself in an area that you suspect is infected with the virus or some other disease.
- Don't move or going fishing in some other location, this may further spread the disease
- Ensure that you Decontaminate your fishing vessels, equipment, wet suits, gloves, etc.
- Appropriate disposal of abalone shell, meat and gut

## Decontamination

Decontamination must be undertaken away from the water's edge so that soapy water does not affect the health of waterways, and as soon as reasonably possible after leaving the water.

## Vessels

- All organic matter from inside and outside the vessel should be removed

## Wetsuits and Dive Equipment

- Ideally, wetsuits should be washed with a neoprene wash (available from dive and surf shops) although a mild liquid soap or shampoo will suffice.
- Dive tanks, buoyancy vests, regulators and masks that have not come into contact with abalone can be washed down in soap-free freshwater.
- Equipment that has come into contact with abalone, such as catch bags, gloves, dive knives and measuring devices, should be soaked in soapy freshwater for 30 minutes and then rinsed.

## People and clothing

- Divers who come into contact with abalone should wash their hands with soapy water.
- Spray any waterproof clothing with soapy freshwater and rinse.
- On returning home, wash clothes with laundry detergent.
- Decontaminated vessels, wetsuits, dive equipment and clothing should be allowed to dry.

## Disposal of viscera

Abalone shell, viscera (meat and gut) should not be:

- shucked (taken from the shell) at sea,
- dumped into the sea,
- used as fishing bait.
- Take your abalone catch home and dispose of the waste with your household rubbish.

## Commercial

The commercial abalone industry has adopted strict bio-Security protocols developed. For information, see the Victorian Abalone Divers Association Inc. ***Abalone Harvesting Code of Practice.***

## Contact Phone Numbers

1. Disease Watch Hotline      Phone. 1800 675 888
2. Fish Reporting Hotline      13FISH ( 13 3474 )
3. VADA      1800 292 004