

Venus Clam (2020)

Venerupis largillierti



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STOCK STATUS OVERVIEW

Jurisdiction	Stock	Stock status	Indicators
Tasmania	Georges Bay Venus Clam Fishery	Recovering	Biomass surveys, CPUE, catch

STOCK STRUCTURE

Venerupis largillierti (commonly known as ‘Venus Clams’) is endemic to New Zealand, but its range extended to Tasmania (probably following accidental introduction) in 1963, where it remains genetically indistinguishable from New Zealand populations on the basis of allozyme analysis [Maguire and Ward 2005, Tarbath and Gardner 2014]. It is found sub-tidally in both muddy and sandy substrates in shallow estuarine waters [Gabriel and Macpherson 1962] on parts of Tasmania’s east and south east coasts [Grove 2011]. There is limited information on stock structure; however, given the relatively short larval life span, it is expected that the ‘Venus Clams’ in individual bays would constitute separate stocks. The only commercial fishery for this species in Tasmania is at Georges Bay, St Helens, where it forms beds on intertidal sandbars and in deeper channels.

Here, assessment of stock status is presented at the management unit level—Georges Bay Venus Clam Fishery (Tasmania).

STOCK STATUS

Georges Bay Venus Clam Fishery

The harvest strategy for ‘Venus Clams’ in Tasmania in the Shellfish Fishery Policy Document [DPIPWE 2007] uses estimated total biomass and size structure as performance indicators, but does not identify levels or limit reference points below which the stock would be classified as recruitment overfished. A commercial fishery has operated for the ‘Venus Clams’ in Georges Bay since around 1985 and until 2007 the fishery was managed principally through the allocation of half yearly or yearly permits. From 2007 a formal total allowable commercial catch (TACC) structure was introduced, splitting Georges Bay into two zones with two associated commercial licences in the northern zone and one in the southern zone [DPIPWE 2007]. The recreational catch is considered

negligible compared to the commercial catch.

In the southern zone of the fishery, there has been a fishery closure in place since 2013. The sudden decline in biomass was attributed to prolonged rainfall in the bay's catchment during 2011 [Tarbath and Gardner 2013], which led to low salinity levels and extensive mortality of the 'Venus Clams' population. A survey conducted in 2013 indicated there was no fishable stock, although a juvenile cohort (mode 15–19 mm) was present, which was expected to grow to legal size within two years [Tarbath and Gardner 2013]. However, there has been no indication of any stock recovery to date which may be linked to the environmental changes within the bay accentuated by the extensive development of seagrass beds on the previously productive sand spits.

In the northern zone of the fishery, biennial surveys have provided estimates of biomass since 2007, with TACCs determined from the biomass estimate up to a maximum harvest fraction of 10 per cent [TAFI 2009, Tarbath and Gardner 2012, 2013, 2014]. Biomass estimates in 2012 and 2014 were 537 and 467 tonnes (t), the highest on record in the fishery, with a mean estimate since 2003 of 412.9 t (\pm 110.5 t standard deviation) [Tarbath and Gardner 2014]. A survey in 2017 estimated biomass at 76.2 t (95 per cent C.I. 54.7 t to 97.6 t), with 65 per cent (49.4 t) of the biomass was above the legal size limit of 40 mm [Keane and Gardner 2017]. The total biomass was 15 per cent of that than when last surveyed in 2014 (463 t), due to decreases in clam density, the area of fishable clam beds, and the size of clams.

The above evidence indicates that the stock is currently in a depleted state.

In 2013 the TACC was set at to 53.7 t, 10 per cent of the estimated biomass. Catches were 42.2 t and 39.9 t at a catch per unit effort (CPUE) of 76.4 and 64 kg per hour in the 2013 and 2014 seasons, respectively. In 2015 only 24.3 t of the 46.3 t TACC was landed and CPUE fell to the lowest rate since records began (27 kg per hour) [Jones and Gardner 2016]. In response to the declines in biomass for the 2015–16 fishing season the two Georges Bay northern zone licensees took a voluntary reduction in TACC to 3 t (less than one per cent of 2014 estimated biomass) [Jones and Gardner 2016].

The 2017 survey showed large numbers of pre-recruits in length frequency distributions with cohorts of clams around 24 and 40 mm. In terms of total abundance, 69 per cent of the estimated population was under the minimum size limit of 40 mm. The apparent strength of sub-legal size classes suggests there will be increases in fishable biomass in coming years [Keane and Gardner 2017]. This was supported by the most recent survey update in 2018 [Keane and Gardner 2018]. The 2018–19 TACC was set at 4.9 t, or 10 per cent of the estimated fishable biomass [Keane and Gardner 2018]. The low exploitation rate combined with signs of recruitment indicates that the current level of fishing pressure is expected to allow the stock to recover.

The above evidence indicates that the biomass of this stock is depleted and that recruitment is likely to have been impaired. However, the current level of fishing mortality and the evidence of high numbers of pre-recruits in the 2017 and 2018 surveys should allow the stock to recover from its recruitment impaired state. On the basis of the evidence provided above, the Georges Bay Venus Clam Fishery (Tasmania) management unit is classified as a **recovering stock**.

BIOLOGY

Venus Clams biology < [Kent et al. 1999, Tarbath and Gardner 2014]

Species	Longevity / Maximum Size	Maturity (50 per cent)
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Venus Clam	70 mm	< 27 mm
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DISTRIBUTION



Distribution of reported commercial catch of Venus Clams

TABLES

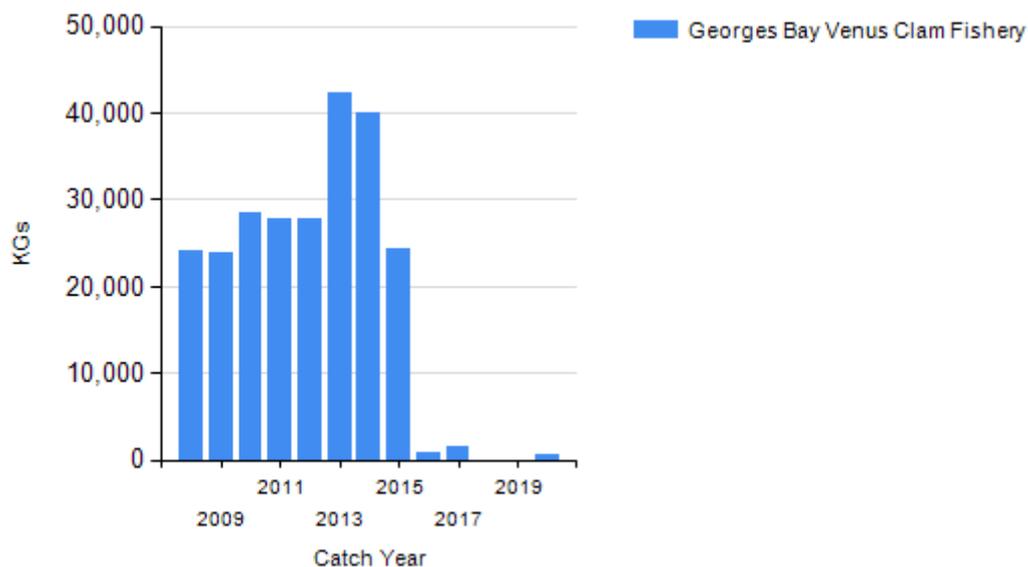
Fishing methods	
	Tasmania
Commercial	
Diving	✓
Recreational	
Hand collection	✓

Management Methods	
	Tasmania
Commercial	
Gear restrictions	✓
Limited entry	✓
Size limit	✓
Spatial closures	✓
Total allowable catch	✓
Recreational	
Bag limits	✓
Gear	✓

restrictions	
Size limit	✓

Catch	
	Tasmania
Commercial	0 t
Recreational	100 per day

CATCH CHART



Commercial catch of Venus Clam - note confidential catch not shown

References	
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Jones and Gardner 2016	Jones, H and Gardner, C, 2016, 2016 Small Bivalve Survey Assessment and Stock Status Update, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies Report, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
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