



Message from the Minister for Fishing & Boating, Jaala Pulford.

What a jam-packed couple of months we've had this year. While the year 2020 has started off with the worst bushfire season in history, I am humbled by the efforts of every Victorian to step up and aid in the recovery process.

The month of January saw VFA Fisheries Officers from across the State aiding bushfire-recovery efforts in Mallacoota. During this time, Fisheries Officers ferried many firefighters to and from Mallacoota using their Fisheries Kevlacat vessels. They also assisted in ferrying supplies and evacuating locals and wildlife.

Thankfully, our dedicated team of Fisheries Officers at Mallacoota were safe and able to help, but they too suffered loss of property, along with many locals and small businesses in the area.

I am sad to report that the fires destroyed the Abalone Fishermen's Co-Operative at Mallacoota, which has been a pillar for the seafood industry in Mallacoota for more than 50 years, and is the biggest employer in the town.

I recently visited the Co-Op and was happy to advise the Chairman, Geoff Ellis, that the Andrews Labor Government will provide them with \$300,000 to help them get back on their feet as quickly as possible.

Also, as you would have heard, as part of the VFA's bushfire response plan, I launched the 'Golden Tag' competition in Lakes Entrance on Friday 28 February. This is a tag-recapture program to encourage recreational fishers to return to fire-affected towns in East Gippsland and North East Victoria.

1,000 fish have been tagged around towns like Mallacoota, Cann River, Bemm River, Orbost, Marlo, Lakes Entrance, Lake Tyers, Omeo, Dartmouth, Mitta Mitta, Corryong, Tallangatta and Bright.

We're going to make sure people flock to these towns, because the first 10 tagged fish to be reported by fishers will earn the lucky fisher a

\$10,000 cheque, with tagged fish beyond the first 10 to be awarded a \$2,000 cash prize.

We're hoping to get as many recreational fishers as possible back to East Gippsland and the north east with their families and friends, spending money and helping local communities get back on their feet. We want this to happen all year round, so the competition is running for an entire year!

A number of tagged fish have already been caught and I hear the towns were buzzing the Labour Day long weekend. So get out there, have fun, and catch a golden tagged fish!

You can find out more about the Golden Tag Competition here: www.vfa.vic.gov.au/goldentag.



Fisheries vessels leaving Lakes Entrance at 7am carrying 24 firefighters to Mallacoota.



The Fisheries bushfire recovery team at Mallacoota



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