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The Hon. Martin Pakula  
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events  
Level 36, 121 Exhibition Street,  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
2020

Thursday 10 September

Dear Minister,

**Re: concern over the harvesting of Spider Crabs on the Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip Bay.**

We write regarding your responsibilities as Tourism Minister, regarding the potential risk to the world-renowned marine spectacle, the spider crab aggregation in Port Phillip Bay, after the recent explosion of spider crab harvesting. This tourism drawcard in recent years has seen environmental damage, marine pollution and issues to public safety on popular piers on the Mornington Peninsula. We seek your support to safeguard and celebrate the spider crabs and their potentially important tourism value. The key solution in our view is through a seasonal no-take period during the popular annual spider crab moulting season between the months of April – July, and ask that you raise this support with the Minister for Fishing and Boating.

This well-loved tourism drawcard, as featured by David Attenborough on Blue Planet II, occurs each year between the months of April-July, when the march of the spectacular spider crabs come in to the shallows to undertake their annual moulting, which attracts significant numbers or according to local operators of visitors (internationally, interstate and across Victoria) to witness this marine spectacle.

Unfortunately, the 2019/2020 spider crab migration events saw for the first time a sharp increase in intensity of crab catching from piers on the Mornington Peninsula, which until this time was unprecedented. The sheer volume of crab harvesting, combined with the nature of the fishing practices, and the high number of water users observing the crabs from above and below water, caused public health and safety, and environmental issues.

The 2020 event, saw a further escalation of crowds of people harvesting with nets, using chicken carcasses as bait, which littered the seafloor in a small area, damage to marine life, marine litter, crab pots being dropped on people in the water, and on marine life - all confined to a small area from a single section of pier.

This is causing significant public health, and safety, and environmental concern from audiences at the local, state, national and international level, and over the past months, has gained wide media coverage in [The Age](#), [Channel 9 News](#).

Given the potentially high tourism value of the spider crabs, and given the hardships faced due to Covid-19, by local tourism operators there is great value in safeguarding and celebrating such an important tourism drawcard to Victoria's economy. Without protection of this natural asset, we are concerned it is at risk.

While we understand the responsibility for management of crab harvesting sits with the Minister for Fishing and Boating, Melissa Horne, and the Victorian Fisheries Management Authority (VFA), it is an issue requiring the collaboration of several government agencies, with an interest in the safety of people in the area, and the protection of marine life. We think this is an issue relevant to your portfolio and requiring attention, and due to the high tourism potential that the spider crabs offer, are worth protecting and celebrating.

As Minister for Tourism, you would need to have regard for Victorian Marine and Coastal Policy, (which was recently implemented by the Andrews Government), which supports the need to recognise the protection of migratory species at critical life stages, for example, in relation to access of marine and coastal crown land (*page 55*) “minimise risk to public safety; protect cultural values; protect natural values and habitats at critical life stages (such as for migratory and nesting shorebirds).”

Specifically with regard to recreation and tourism, the policy also states the need to “minimise impacts on environmental and cultural values; minimise impacts on other users; maintain public safety; respond to the carrying capacity of the site”, which is very relevant to the circumstances experienced during the 2020 event.

There is also a high degree of public interest. The VNPA is working with the community groups Spider Crab Alliance and Spider Crab Melbourne, also known as SOS #SaveOurSpiderCrabs, representing divers, fishers, educators, scientists, other water users, and concerned community members to garner local and broader support from the community, Councils, conservation groups, tourism and fishing bodies, and local businesses. We have also had positive feedback from local members and the Council to safeguard and celebrate this incredible marine spectacle.

Our groups have also been meeting and working with the Victorian Fisheries Authority, to assist in their work to monitor spider crab movements in an attempt to gain their support for a seasonal no-take period. So far, there does not appear to be appetite from them to implement any no-take period. Without government action, we are concerned that the 2021 event will be an even greater hazard and the potential risk to current and future tourism.

**We therefore seek your support to safeguard and celebrate by supporting a seasonal no-take period during the annual spider crab moulting season between the months of April – July, and also ask you to raise this support with the Minister for Fishing and Boating. In our view, this is the only solution to solve the problems faced the past two spider crab moulting seasons to protect this tourism drawcard.**

Spider crab protection measures are supported by local and state-wide groups, The Spider Crab Alliance, and Spider Crab Melbourne, almost 34,000 petition signatories, statements of position from 50+ local businesses, industry representatives and educators, and 1000+ statements of support from individuals including marine biologists, scientists and educators, verbal and social media support from anglers and their representative bodies.

We believe a short period of no-take of the crabs during their peak moulting time would mitigate the majority of issues and risks, and given it is a new fishing pressure, it would gain wide community support, including people with fishing interests.

We believe this is a real opportunity if acted on quickly to curb before it gets even further out of control in the coming spider crab seasons. If we can provide any more evidence or information, we are happy to do that.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet or discuss the issue further with appropriate staff. Please contact Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner at [shannon@vnpa.org.au](mailto:shannon@vnpa.org.au), or on 0433 481 346.

The VNPA have been a community voice for protection of Victoria's unique natural heritage for over 67 years. VNPA is an independent, non-profit, membership-based group, which exists to protect Victoria's natural environment and biodiversity through the establishment and effective management of national parks, conservation reserves and other measures.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Ruchel', written in a cursive style.

Matt Ruchel  
Executive Director  
Victorian National Parks Association