

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 16

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Rebuilding fisheries in the Hauraki Gulf

Momentum is building for the development of a marine spatial plan to apply across the Hauraki Gulf and eastern Coromandel. The Hauraki Gulf Forum, whose role is to promote better management of the area's natural resources, will lead the planning. This process follows last year's *State of Our Gulf* report that highlighted degraded habitats, especially in the inner Gulf.

Much work is required to improve the health of our fisheries and waterways so people can safely fish, swim, surf, snorkel or enjoy being by the sea.

The Hauraki Gulf has the best snapper fishery in the country and is on the doorstep of our biggest city. The wide variety of sheltered fishing opportunities around the islands of the Gulf and Coromandel attract thousands of anglers, both residents and visitors.

Biggest impact on fishermen

Management decisions for the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, which spans the water from the northern Mokohinau Islands to Waihi Beach in the Bay of Plenty, could affect amateur fishers more than any other group.

In August John Holdsworth, science advisor for the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC), made a presentation to the Hauraki Gulf Forum's annual seminar.

Fishing is the pastime of choice from many people in the region and their perspective on the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is important. Amateur fishers simply want:

- Reasonable access to quality fishing in places where they traditionally fish;
- To catch a feed;
- A day out of the office and home;
- A chance of catching a decent sized fish, maybe even a beauty;
- Fair and reasonable rules;
- Access to kai moana that is safe to eat.

More and bigger fish needed

Rebuilding abundance, that is the size and numbers of fish, in inshore fisheries should be the foundation stone of any management plan. For example, the snapper fishery has improved in the Gulf in the last few years, but the latest stock assessment shows that stocks are at half the level they should be. Stock levels could be a lot worse in the Bay of Plenty.

Shifting commercial effort out of the Gulf (where snapper abundance is highest) to the Bay of Plenty or East Northland (where abundance is lower) may not be good for fishermen or the stock.

Improving abundance in all areas means:

- Quality fishing for amateurs;
- Less commercial effort is expended catching quota;
- Reduced emissions and seabed impacts; and
- It buffers the stock from adverse environmental events.

NZ Sport Fishing will be watching the spatial planning process carefully. There may be opportunities for charter skippers and the public to contribute.

Restoring habitat

Plans are underway to trial sub-tidal habitat restoration projects. The extensive mussel beds that were once found in the Firth of Thames could be re-established to provide juvenile fish habitat and for filtering large volumes of water.

Mussel shell waste from commercial farms could be laid in specific areas and seeded using some of the farms' unmarketable sized mussels.

Horse mussel beds could be re-established in areas free of trawling and dredging.

It is essential that fishermen and the community have a role in these projects, as they have in the numerous replanting and pest control programs on the islands in the Gulf.

BREAK OUT BOX**Horse mussels**

In the 1960s longlining was limited to areas that were free of horse mussels, because setting over the beds meant losing lots of fishing gear. Horse mussel beds were so dense in the Hauraki Gulf they were smashed down, by two vessels towing shipping chain between them, to make a trawl zone. No commercial fishery was established for horse mussels so their demise went largely unnoticed by the public.