

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 31

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How low can we go?

After waiting all December the Ministry for Primary Industries finally released its consultation papers for southern scallops and crayfish at the end of January. MPI has only given us, the public of New Zealand, 18 working days to respond. For such important fisheries this is a disgrace and the NZ Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) will be strongly objecting to this process.

Submissions were due by February 21st and any changes will be implemented by April 2014.

Southern scallops

MPI propose two management options for Scallop 7, around the top of the South Island. One is the status quo; the other is a significant reduction to the commercial catch limits.

Table 1: Proposed Total Allowable Catch (TAC), Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) and allowances for Scallop 7 (SCA7) (tonnes, t, meatweight)

	TAC (t)	TACC (t)	Maori customary (t)	Recreational (t)	Other mortality (t)
Option 1 (status quo)	827	747	40	40	0
Option 2	130	46	40	40	4

Nathan Guy, as Minister of Primary Industries, has a lawful duty to sustainably manage all fisheries to maintain their potential to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Given the state of this scallop fishery it is inconceivable that Nathan Guy could lawfully retain the status quo. These catch limits were set in 2002 when the fishery was abundant and catches were high. Now the fishery has all-but collapsed and commercial fishers have imposed a voluntary closure in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay.

Commercial effort is now focused in the Marlborough Sounds and this has led to increased conflict with recreational and environmental interests.

The NZSFC fisheries team acknowledges that a 94% cut to individual's quota may well spell the end for sole operators in this fishery, leaving the bigger companies to take up their quota. This factor may influence the Minister's final decision.

However, the NZSFC is clear, the Ministry's proposed option 2 will not reduce real-time commercial catch and a rebuilt fishery is unlikely. An even larger catch reduction is required to give the fishery the best chance of recovery.

There will be healthy discussion amongst the team before an alternative catch strategy is submitted to MPI, but three things are abundantly clear:

- Scallop dredges induce relatively high mortality, where there is known mortality the Minister is obliged to set aside a tonnage to allow for it;
- We cannot keep smashing these precious fisheries and the seabed; and
- Scallops within the Marlborough Sounds above the non-commercial yield ought to remain in the water to support the marine ecosystem.

Crayfish

There is a raft of proposals for the future management of five crayfish stocks around the country. All except

the west coast proposals, from the Kaipara Harbour to Westland (CRA9), seem to be based on assumptions of stock size that do not fit with reality.

Amateur catch in CRA2, between Bream Head and East Cape, has virtually collapsed because there are so few crayfish available to recreational divers.

In CRA3, Gisborne, commercial fishers have a government-sanctioned concession allowing them to take crayfish smaller than what recreational fishers can harvest.

Given the consistent feedback from experienced recreational divers that there are few legal crayfish in previously abundant waters, we can only assume the “science” is flawed. But we are denied access to the raw data to make our own calculations.

In our view, filtering the figures and applying contrived rules is forcing these fisheries down to marginal levels. This is denying us and future generations reasonable access to our cray fisheries. This is not good enough. The Minister must make a stand against continued depletion.

Check out www.sportfishing.org.nz - Fisheries – Latest news, to read the final submission.