

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 33

New Zealand Fishing News magazine, May 2014 edition



Marlborough Sounds scallops in jeopardy

Since 2002 the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for upper South Island scallops has been 747 tonnes. In recent years commercial landings have been less than 50 tonnes per annum. In February we were given only 18 working days to respond to a complex management review of this fishery and selected crayfish stocks.

After considering all the evidence the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council submitted for a conservative decision, a zero TACC and no commercial dredging in the Marlborough Sounds.

On 20th March Nathan Guy went with the Ministry's option 3, commonly known as the "Talley's option". The TACC has been reduced from 747 to 400 tonnes of processed scallop meat. This converts to 3,200 tonnes of scallops in the shell, which is much more than the entire New Zealand TACC for blue cod of 2,332 tonnes whole weight.

This decision has been made even though the Minister is aware that the decline in scallop numbers in Golden and Tasman Bays has led to a recent voluntary closure. Commercial effort is now focused within the Marlborough Sounds and this has already led to increased conflict with recreational interests. The Minister is relying on the industry to show self-restraint when taking scallops from the Marlborough Sounds and agree to closed areas if agreement can be reached. The non-commercial allowances and regulations remain intact.

A rebuild is required

Scallop populations are known to be highly variable. Southern Scallops (SCA7) has been hammered since the early 1960s and is currently at its lowest level since surveys began in 1998.

SCA7 extends east from Cape Farewell to the Tory Channel and includes Golden Bay, Tasman Bay and the Marlborough Sounds.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council acknowledges the top of the South Island was once a very productive ecosystem that has been affected by increased siltation. But years of commercial dredging and trawling has contributed to the massive collapse of scallops in Golden and Tasman Bays, the lack of regrowth, the acknowledged poor survival of spat and lack of suitable habitat in these areas.

And now, the scallop fleet will focus on the Marlborough Sounds where surveys show that stocks have declined and the exploitation rate increased.

The potential for disaster is very high and, in our opinion, poses unacceptable and potentially unlawful risk. The Minister is risking the productivity and fragile nature of the Marlborough Sounds seabed by setting a commercial quota 10 times the surveyed sustainable yield.

The sustainability or productivity of other species within the Marlborough Sounds could also be put at risk. Blue cod is already subject to a controversial and strict management regime that limits recreational fishing.

Nathan Guy has an obligation to manage fisheries sustainably, to enable residents and visitors to the area the opportunity to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing and to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

As the Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough Sounds areas are some of the most popular regions in the country it is important to future-proof fisheries decisions.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council believes a more conservative decision was required. It is unfortunate that the fishery and locals are being held to ransom merely to appease quota owners' interests. This is not good enough.