Review of sustainability measures for flatfish (FLA 1), rig (SPO 1), and grey mullet (GMU 1) in the northern North Island

The Minister of Fisheries has requested a review of catch limits for flatfish (FLA 1), rig (SPO 1), grey mullet (GMU 1). Coastal communities (including some commercial fishers) have expressed concerns about sustainability and local depletion of stocks in various harbours on the west coast of the North Island.

The initial position papers for these stocks summarise the information the Ministry of Fisheries has about stock status – including scientific assessment, biological characteristics, anecdotal information, and current and historic use of the fisheries.

For all three stocks, there is some uncertainty about whether the stock is currently at, above, or below a level that could produce a maximum sustainable yield. The papers propose a range of options that aim to address the concerns that have been raised, while accounting for uncertainty in the information about stock status.

Flatfish

- Most of the catch in FLA 1 is yellow-belly flounder. Sand flounder is also caught, particularly in the Firth of Thames.

- FLA 1 does not yet have a total allowable catch (TAC), allowances for customary and recreational fishing, or an allowance for other sources of fishing-related mortality. As part of the catch limit review, MFish proposes to set these measures for FLA 1.

- Flatfish abundance and recruitment appear to have declined in FLA 1. Fishing pressure is considered not to be the most likely cause of decline. However, MFish considers that the new TAC still needs to take into account the possible decrease in flatfish abundance.

- MFish therefore proposes two TAC options. Both options propose to set a TAC based on recent use of the fishery. It is not proposed at this stage to reduce catches below existing levels. Because the current total allowable commercial catch (TACC) is set well above recent catches, either option would result in a decrease to the existing TACC.

- The current proposals will prevent any additional effort or catch occurring in FLA 1. MFish proposes to monitor the impact of any reduction, and take further management action if required.

Rig

- There is little scientific information to suggest a sustainability concern in SPO 1. For this reason, one option proposes to retain the existing allowances for customary and recreational fishers, and TACC.

- Nonetheless, anecdotal information does indicate sustainability concerns, at least in parts of SPO 1. Furthermore, the existing TACC may be artificially high. The best available information on historic rig catches indicates that the existing TACC is substantially undercaught, and has never been fully caught. Rig are also relatively vulnerable to overfishing, because they are less productive than many fish species.

- For these reasons, MFish has also proposed an option to reduce the TAC and TACC.

Grey mullet

- For several years concerns have been expressed about the sustainability of catches in the grey mullet fishery. The catch in the commercial fishery has generally shown an on-going decline in the west coast sub-stock (North Cape to Tirua Point, south of Kawhia) relative to the effort spent catching them. Most of the commercial fishery for the stock occurs in this western area. The catch-per-unit-effort index is relatively stable on the eastern side of the stock (North Cape to Cape Runaway).

- MFish considers that the present use of the fishery may be exposing the stock to some sustainability risk, and it is reasonable to consider options to reduce this risk. MFish proposes TAC options that reduce the total removals from the stock by either 5, 10, or 15%.

- Two approaches are proposed for setting the recreational allowance – a proportional reduction in line with the reduction to the TACC, or secondly, a non-proportional approach where preference is given to the recreational sector based on their use and value of the resource.

- Depending on which of the three TAC options is chosen, and the approach applied to setting the recreational allowance, there are likely to be varying impacts on the recreational and commercial sectors. Options for the recreational allowance for the stock vary from 70 to 150 tonnes (the present allowance is 100 tonnes). Options for the TACC vary from 655 tonnes to 878 tonnes (the present TACC is 925 tonnes).

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Please see the initial position papers for more information. If you have any questions or comments, contact MFish at the Auckland office, on (09) 820 1990.

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Current and proposed options for flatfish – FLA 1

Option	TAC (tonnes)	Customary allowance (tonnes)	Recreational allowance (tonnes)	Other sources of fishing-related mortality (tonnes)	TACC (tonnes)
CURRENT	-	-	-	-	1187
Option 1 (TAC based on recent catch)	1382	270	270	27	815
Option 2 (TAC based on recent catch)	1307	270	270	27	740

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Current and proposed options for rig – SPO 1

Option	TAC (tonnes)	Customary allowance (tonnes)	Recreational allowance (tonnes)	Other sources of fishing-related mortality (tonnes)	TACC (tonnes)
CURRENT	737	20	25	-	692.064
1 - TAC based on existing catch limits	752.064	20	25	15	692.064
2 - TAC based on recent catches	605	20	25	15	545

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Current and proposed options for grey mullet – GMU 1

Option	Approach to setting allowance & TACC	TAC (tonnes)	Customary allowance (tonnes)	Recreational allowance (tonnes)	Other sources of fishing-related mortality (tonnes)	TACC (tonnes)
CURRENT	N/A	1125	100	100	-	925
1a	Proportional	1101	100	90	33	878
1b	Non-proportional	1101	100	100	33	868
1c	Non-proportional	1101	150	150	33	768
2a	Proportional	1043	100	80	31	832
2b	Non-proportional	1043	100	100	31	812
2c	Non-proportional	1043	150	150	31	712
3a	Proportional	985	100	70	30	785
3b	Non-proportional	985	100	100	30	755
3c	Non-proportional	985	150	150	30	655