

SUBMISSION SUMMARY



Image: Bryce Hawkins

Northland scallop review

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In December 2019 Fisheries New Zealand proposed to reduce the commercial catch limits for scallop harvest in Northland. The Scallop 1 fishery extends from Ahipara on the northwest coast, down the northeast coast to Leigh, Cape Rodney.

An alliance of the largest representative recreational fishing organisations in Aotearoa jointly submitted in support of the proposed reductions in February 2020, and called for new measures to better manage the depleted scallop fishery in Northland. The Minister of Fisheries is due to make a decision by April 2020.

Scallop management

Scallops are a valuable species for fishing, environmental and cultural reasons. They are a taonga [treasure] for Maori. The commercial scallop fishery has a history of serial depletion, as one bed is exhausted fishers move on, find another, exploit that then move again. Over time those beds become less productive.

The boom and bust cycle in scallop fisheries is not new. We only have to look at the Coromandel and now-closed South Island scallop fisheries to see the outcome of intense exploitation.

History has proven that using the Total Allowable Commercial Catch to manage scallop catches is ineffective. We recommended the Minister apply a mix of input controls such as effort limits, area-based management and catch limits to better manage the scallop fisheries.

Scallop dredging

Dredging has been the default harvesting method for many years. Given the increased stressors now affecting the marine environment the Minister must review the use

of dredges, with a view to limiting their use to selected deeper water areas that are suitable for scallop dredging.

Catch levels

Commercial catches are measured by the meat weight removed from the scallop shell. The joint submission supported the Minister reducing the annual Total Allowable Commercial Catch from 40 to 10 tonnes meat weight on the basis that dredging in inshore waters is reviewed, and that commercial hand gathering of scallops is permitted in selected areas.

The 7.5 tonne allowances set aside for both Maori customary and recreational fishing interests ought to remain. Scallop abundance can be highly variable so in good years people harvest scallops and in poor years few are taken.

Joint submitters

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council-LegaSea and New Zealand Angling & Casting Association jointly submitted a response to the management proposals. This work was completed in collaboration with the New Zealand Underwater Association and Spearfishing New Zealand.

What next?

The Stuart Nash, the Minister of Fisheries, is due to make a decision in March 2020. Any new catch limits will apply from 1 April, 2020. During the year the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council will develop a specific dredging policy and discuss this at their Annual General Meeting in September.

The reduced commercial catch limits will allow some beds to recover so the scallop fishery continues to sustain people, from Ahipara on the west coast, down the east coast to Leigh, Cape Rodney.