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Sustainability Review 2019
Fisheries Management
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1 July 2020

Submission: Review the TAC for Blue Cod in BCO 5

Recommendations

1. That the Minister agrees to option 3 with an increase in allowance for other sources of fishing mortality which reduces the TAC by 38% to 894 tonnes with a review in 3 years time.
 - a) The TACC is reduced to 700 tonnes.
 - b) The recreational allowance is reduced to 85 tonnes in-line with the latest survey estimate plus section 111 landings.
 - c) The allowance for customary catch increases to 20 t, with the ability to review as required.
 - d) The allowance for other sources of fishing related mortality is set at 89 tonnes, 10% of the TAC.
2. That the Minister instructs Fisheries New Zealand to apply the environment principles of the Fisheries Act 1996 and remove bottom contact fishing methods like trawling and dredging from habitats of particular significance to blue cod and the long-term productivity of this stock.
3. The Minister orders a review of the interpretation of the National Blue Cod Strategy placing unwarranted new restrictions on fishing outside the traffic light areas (outside the 12 nmile limit) and returning to shore.

The submitters

4. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) appreciates the opportunity to submit on the proposals to review the TAC for blue cod in BCO 3, with submissions due 1 July 2020.
5. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council is a recognised national sports organisation with over 36,200 affiliated members from 55 clubs nationwide. The Council has initiated LegaSea to generate widespread awareness and support for the need to restore abundance in our inshore marine environment. Also, to broaden NZSFC involvement in marine management advocacy,

research, education and alignment on behalf of our members and LegaSea supporters. www.legasea.co.nz. Together we are 'the submitters'.

6. The submitters are committed to ensuring that sustainability measures and environmental management controls are designed and implemented to achieve the Purpose and Principles of the Fisheries Act 1996, including “maintaining the potential of fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations...” [s8(2)(a) Fisheries Act 1996].
7. The submitters note the consultation time frame of 26 working days for this process. This time frame has allowed some consultation with local recreational interests, our affected clubs and other representative organisations including the New Zealand Angling and Casting Association. This year the sustainability round includes 12 inshore species in 15 QMAs which has stretched our resources.
8. Our representatives are available to discuss this submission in more detail if required. We look forward to positive outcomes from this review and would like to be kept informed of future developments. Our contact is Helen Pastor, secretary@nzsportfishing.org.nz.

The proposal

9. Fisheries New Zealand is proposing to review the sustainability measures for blue cod in Quota Management Area 5 (BCO 5) for the 1 October 2020 fishing year. Concerns about the BCO 5 fishery led to the total allowable catch (TAC) being reviewed in 2011 with the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) reduced by 20% and the recreational daily bag limit reduced from 30 to 20. Despite these reductions, continued concerns resulted in voluntary shelving being introduced by quota holders, and the regulated mesh size used on commercial cod pots being increased in 2017.
10. A new stock assessment undertaken in 2019 concluded BCO 5 is about 35% of the unfished biomass and that at the current catch levels (which is lower than the TACC) the stock is likely to be overfished. However, there are a number of uncertainties in the model inputs and model structure.
11. Fisheries New Zealand have proposed three TAC options option 1 is the status quo, options 2 and 3 are decreases and are thought to be within the range of yield estimates that should move the stock towards the target biomass (Table 4).

Table 4: Options for varying TAC, TACC and allowances (all in tonnes) for BCO 5

Stock	Option	Total Allowable Catch	Total Allowable Commercial Catch	Allowances		
				Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality to the stock caused by fishing
BCO 5	Option 1 (<i>Status quo</i>)	1,452	1,239	2	191	20
BCO 5	Option 2	999 ↓ (31%)	874 ↓ (29%)	20 ↑ (N/A)	85 ↓ (55%)	20
BCO 5	Option 3	825 ↓ (43%)	700 ↓ (44%)	20 ↑ (N/A)	85 ↓ (55%)	20

The Submission

12. The blue cod stock in BCO 5 has supported a large commercial fishery for 30 years, but now is in decline. A reduction in the TACC in 2011 and recent shelving of ACE by commercial fishers does not appear to have halted that decline. This highlights the problem of using a single output control on catch as the primary management tool over a large quota management area.
13. Tagged blue cod have mostly been recaptured close to their release sites and populations can be localised and habitat specific. They also respond readily to bait, whether on a hook or in a pot. Site specific abundance and high catchability make blue cod susceptible to local depletion and serial depletion. Typically, areas close to port are fished down first and the fishery has to move further and further out to maintain catch rates. Any sign of recovery in accessible areas is soon mopped up. Long distance fishing continues until the boundary is reached and the fishery can no longer be sustained.
14. When stocks are fished down fishing gear is moved more often to maintain catch rates despite low overall abundance. A multi-layered approach of method restrictions, spatial management and catch limits is needed, even in areas that once had some of the highest blue cod catch and catch rates in the country. Fishers themselves may be best placed to develop a management plan for the fishery but the QMS does not solve the race for space.
15. Blue cod have a complex life history with individuals over a large length range changing sex from female to male and southland they are 4 or 5 years old before they mature. Stock productivity is reduced when fishing pressure is high. There is also evidence that abundance and productivity can be adversely affected by disturbance of benthic habitat by bottom contact fishing methods.
16. There are some compounding problems with the stock assessment model inputs and model structure, particularly modelling three statistical areas separately, a move to an age-based model when catch-at-age data was lacking, and the relationship between abundance, growth and sex change dynamics. There have also been changes in pot design and mesh size as well as changes in fisher behaviour which makes CPUE hard to interpret.
17. Given the uncertainties with current status and future projection the submitters support option 3 with a review in 3 years time plus a revised allowance for other sources of fishing mortality.
18. We have seen that even in fisheries with long catch histories and reasonable stable stock assessment models that management procedures based on CPUE can fail to halt the decline in a stock. In our view, developing a management procedure at this time it is putting unjustified faith in the current stock assessment model and in the reliability of previous commercial potting CPUE. In addition, fishers are currently changing to electronic commercial catch and effort reporting. It is extremely likely that CPUE derived from electronic reporting will not be comparable to the paper-based reporting used in the stock assessment and in the evaluation of candidate management procedures.
19. The submitters support the reduction of the allowance for recreational fishing interests to 85 t based on the latest survey estimate of 67 tonnes plus 18 tonnes of catch retained for personal use on commercial vessels under section 111 provisions.
20. The submitters want to see the annual reported landings of blue cod taken for private use from commercial vessels in the advice paper to the Minister. They represent a significant portion of the allowance for recreational fishers at a time when recreational bag limits have been cut, quota holders are shelving catch, and the stock is in decline.

21. The submitters support the increase in the customary allowance to 20 t based on the stated requirement for hakari and manaakitanga for occasional significant events.
22. The allowance for other sources of fishing mortality, currently at less than 3% is inadequate, especially considering the assumed release mortality used in the BCO 5 stock assessment was 13% for line fisheries and 100% for pot fisheries. The proportion of catch discarded is not stated. The submitters support an allowance for other sources of fishing mortality of 10% of the TAC.
23. The submitters recommend that Minister instructs Fisheries New Zealand to apply the environment principles of the Fisheries Act 1996 and remove bottom contact fishing methods, like trawling and dredging, from habitats of particular significance to blue cod and the long-term productivity of this stock.
24. There is growing frustration at some of the provisions of the National Blue Cod Strategy. Following extensive and well publicised consultation the strategy has come back with unexpected restrictions on fishing outside the traffic light areas (outside the 12 nmile limit) as follows:
FNZ FAQ – “What if my blue cod spot is out past 12 nautical miles and therefore outside of the blue cod management areas?
“Even though you are outside the blue cod management areas you will have to transit through one of these areas on the way back to where you launched your boat from. Whatever area you transit through to get to back to the boat ramp or launch area will be the limit you will be restricted to even if the blue cod was taken outside of that management area.”
25. This is not an insignificant issue and it will not go away. NZSFC and member clubs raise it now to go on record as opposing this interpretation of the regulations, which is different to the assurances given during the consultation process.