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Sustainability Review 2021
Fisheries Management
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5 February 2021

Proposal to increase the Total Allowable Commercial Catch for yellow-eyed mullet in YEM 9 for 2021/22

Recommendations

The Minister –

1. **Supports Fisheries New Zealand's option 3**, to reduce the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) in Yellow-eyed mullet 9 (YEM 9) to 19 tonnes (t), to reduce the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) to 10 t, and retain the existing tonnages set aside to allow for Maori customary and recreational fishing interests, and for fishing related mortality.

The submitters

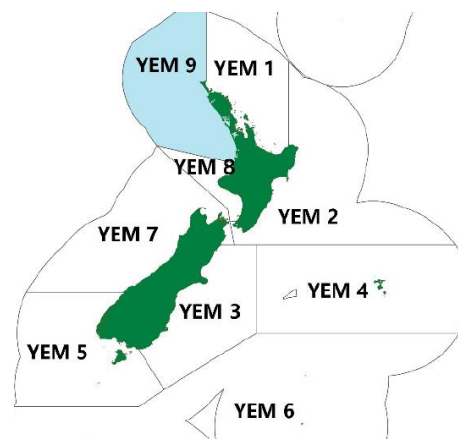
2. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) appreciates the opportunity to submit on the proposals for the future management of Yellow-eyed mullet 9 (YEM 9) for 2021/22. Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) advice of consultation was received on 9 December 2020, with submissions due by 5 February 2021.
3. The NZ Sport Fishing Council is a recognised national sports organisation of 55 affiliated clubs with over 36,200 members 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.
4. The New Zealand Angling and Casting Association (NZACA) is the representative body for its 35 member clubs throughout the country. The Association promotes recreational fishing and the camaraderie of enjoying the activity with fellow fishers. The NZACA is committed to protecting fish stocks and representing its members' right to fish.
5. Collectively we are '*the submitters*'. The joint 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].

- Our representatives are available to discuss this submission in more detail if required. We look forward to positive outcomes from these reviews and would like to be kept informed of future developments. Our contact is Helen Pastor, secretary@nzsportfishing.org.nz.

Background

- Yellow-eyed mullet is a schooling finfish species that occurs commonly in the shallow coastal waters, estuaries, and lower river systems of New Zealand, Norfolk Island, and south and western Australia. In New Zealand, it is found from North Cape to Stewart Island. It is a fast growing, short-lived species: research indicates the age at first spawning is approximately three years and the maximum age is likely seven years.



- Stock structure of yellow-eyed mullet in New Zealand waters is unknown. Yellow-eyed mullet appear to leave their estuarine habitat to spawn in coastal waters over the summer from late December to mid-March. However, there is no information available on the age of recruitment into estuarine systems of New Zealand waters. Within estuaries and river systems, yellow-eyed mullet are separated to some extent by age, with older fish preferring more saline water and juveniles sometimes found in freshwater.
- Most of the commercial catch of yellow-eyed mullet in recent years has come from YEM 1 and YEM 9. Yellow-eyed mullet are targeted using fine (55-65 mm) mesh set nets and ring nets in shallow coastal waters. In YEM 9 most of the catch is taken from the Manukau Harbour.

FNZ Proposals

Details for yellow-eyed mullet in YEM 9

- Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) propose the following options for the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) and associated allowances (Table 1).

Table 1: Management options proposed for yellow-eyed mullet in YEM 9. Figures are all in tonnes.

Option	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Current settings	38	30	4	4	-
Option 1 (<i>Set all other mortality</i>)	38	29 ↓ (1 t)	4	4	1
Option 2	26 ↓ (12 t)	17 ↓ (13 t)	4	4	1
Option 3	19 ↓ (19 t)	10 ↓ (20 t)	4	4	1

Submission

11. Yellow-eyed mullet is a low information stock with poor historical catch records and no usable catch per unit effort (CPUE) information. It is an important forage species for many fish, birds and marine mammals in coastal and harbour waters. The submitters support a precautionary approach to the management of this low information species due to its importance in ecological terms.
12. The submitters are also concerned about potential by-catch of juvenile fish of other species when targeting YEM in important nursery areas such as harbours and estuaries. Juvenile kahawai, trevally grey mullet and snapper can all be found in these environments.

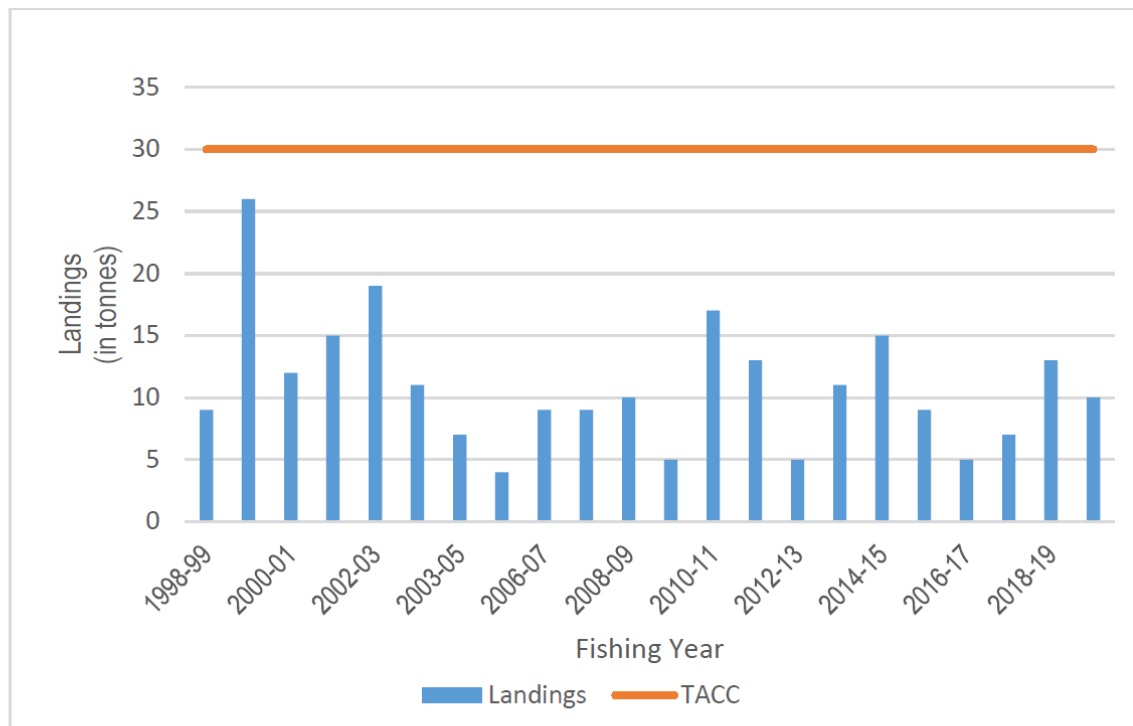


Figure 2: Annual YEM 9 landings from introduction to the QMS to present.

13. The 30 tonne Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for YEM 9 is currently the highest of all YEM Quota Management Areas in New Zealand. YEM 1 is second highest with a 20 t TACC.
14. The submitters support option 3, with a 10 t TACC and 1 tonne allowance for other sources of fishing mortality, as this is the only option that will provide some constraint on target catch in YEM 9. The reported commercial catch has only occasionally exceeded 10 t over the last 15 years (Figure 2).
15. The National Panel Survey estimates of recreational harvest of yellow-eyed mullet in YEM 9 are about 4 tonnes. There is understandably some uncertainty around these estimates because of the low number of fishers reporting catch.
16. Fisheries NZ also need to question the accuracy of using an average weight for yellow-eyed mullet in the 2017-18 National Panel Survey of 290 g, which is significantly higher than the average weight used in the 2011-12 recreational harvest estimate. The submitters support retaining the allowances for customary fishers and recreational fishers at 4 tonnes each.