

Hon Stuart Nash LLM, MMgt, MForSc

MP for Napier

Minister for Economic Development

Minister of Forestry

Minister of Police

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries



B23-0034

Tēnā koe

Changes to sustainability measures for the Coromandel scallop fishery (SCA CS)

I write to inform you of the decisions I have made on sustainability measures for the Coromandel scallop fishery (**SCA CS**).

In making my decisions, I have considered feedback and submissions received from tangata whenua and stakeholders on the initial proposal. I also considered final advice from Fisheries New Zealand, relevant legislative provisions, and my obligations under the *Fisheries Act 1996*.

The Decision Document that informed my decisions is available on the Fisheries New Zealand website (<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/consultations/review-of-sustainability-measures-for-fisheries-2023-april-round/>).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Nash'.

Hon Stuart Nash

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries

Summary of my decisions

Scallops in Coromandel have supported shared fisheries that are highly valued by tangata whenua and stakeholders. This value represents not only the economic return from commercially landed and sold scallops, but also the role that scallops play in the ecosystem and in providing for cultural and social benefits. Over time, this important fishery has shown a substantial decline and now many scallop beds are at historically low levels.

Extensive surveys conducted in 2021 revealed concerns regarding the sustainability of scallop populations in SCA CS, which led to the closure of all but two areas in the SCA CS Quota Management Area (**QMA**) – one at Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island (**Little Barrier**) and one in the Colville Channel (**Colville**). Based on the 2021 survey results, these areas were considered to have biomass sufficient to support some level of ongoing utilization. In 2022 further pre-season surveys of the two open areas were undertaken.

Results from the 2022 surveys revealed further serious declines in scallop abundance and density. In light of the serious declines identified, the previous Minister implemented an emergency measure to close the Little Barrier and Colville areas under section 16 of the Fisheries Act 1996. The emergency closure was a short-term management measure to protect the Little Barrier and Colville areas while a review of sustainability measures and longer-term management could be undertaken.

The 2022 pre-season surveys showed that, since the 2021 surveys, there had been an approximately 85% decline in absolute biomass of recruited (>90 mm) scallops at Little Barrier and an approximately 87% decline in scallop density in comparable areas. At Colville there had been an approximately 37% decline in absolute biomass and a 42% decline in scallop density in comparable areas.

The results of the 2022 surveys are alarming, and I share the concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the sustainability of the Little Barrier and Colville areas, as well the concerns expressed by tangata whenua and stakeholders regarding sustainability of the wider SCA CS stock. I also note that there are currently no accepted measures of the biomass that will sustain the maximum sustainable yield and that the 2022 surveys provide the best available information to support making my decisions.

Based on the information available indicating a serious sustainability concern at the Little Barrier and Colville areas, I have decided to take a cautious approach and close these areas to the recreational and commercial harvest of scallops. This will protect the scallop beds across the entire QMA from the direct and indirect impacts of fishing and provide further opportunity for recovery.

The closure of the Little Barrier and Colville areas will be implemented under a sustainability measure provided for in section 11 of the Fisheries Act 1996. With these further closures in place, the entirety of the SCA CS QMA will be closed to recreational and commercial scallop harvest. The closure will not apply to scallops taken under a customary fishing authorisation. Customary fishing for scallops will continue to be managed by tangata kaitiaki. I am aware that engagement with Iwi in the region has indicated that customary harvest of scallops has voluntarily been limited, if not completely ceased, in order to support recovery of local scallop populations.

I have also considered the catch settings within SCA CS as part of my decision. I note feedback received from stakeholders suggesting that, if a closure was implemented, that the TAC should also be changed to reflect this. I have taken this feedback onboard and have decided to make associated reductions to the TAC, allowances and TACC as follows:

Settings	Management	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
				Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	Partial closure (s11)	19	5	10	3	1
New	Closure (s11) to Little Barrier and Colville Channel, and reductions to TAC, TACC and allowances	11 (↓ 8)	0 (↓ 5)	10	0 (↓ 3)	1

I have decided to reduce the TAC from 19 tonnes to 11 tonnes. The TACC and recreational allowance will be reduced to 0 tonnes, to reflect that no fishing will be taking place while the closure is in effect.

The customary allowance will remain unchanged at 10 tonnes to recognise that customary fishing is not prohibited under a section 11 closure.

To account for any mortality associated with illegal or ‘poaching’ activity, the allowance of 1 tonne for other mortality related to fishing will remain unchanged.

I recognise that my decision will have further significant impacts on stakeholders, particularly the commercial fishers and associated businesses, who make a living harvesting scallops. However, I consider that the sustainability concern identified through the information available requires strong management action. My decisions for SCA CS will provide the stock with the best chance to recover and enable future sustainable utilisation across all sectors.

I have asked my officials to work collaboratively with Treaty Partners and stakeholders while the closures are in place, to consider the most appropriate future management approaches for SCA CS once the fishery has rebuilt. I am advised that Fisheries New Zealand will be seeking new information on the state of SCA CS scallop populations within 3 years and that if the stock has recovered the need for full closures will be reviewed, alongside any future changes to management of scallop fisheries.