

Hon Rachel Brooking

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries
Parliament Buildings, Wellington

28th April 2023

Re: Preventative action to limit the dispersal of Caulerpa in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

Tēnā koe e te Minita,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Oceans and Fisheries and other Ministerial positions. We look forward to working with you.

This letter raises issues relating to fisheries and biosecurity and the risk of spreading invasive marine species by fishing methods. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to act swiftly to prevent the spread of Caulerpa seaweed species around the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) explains on [its website](#) the dispersion of this invasive species. See the excerpt below:

"The 2 seaweeds can be spread by breaking into little pieces. This can happen, for example, by wave action or when anchors and fishing gear are moved into or through weed beds.

Fragments are also carried easily on coastal currents.

Pieces can get tangled in or stuck on equipment (for example, nets, dive and fishing gear, and crayfish pots). It can survive out of water for up to a week or more if it's in a moist location (like in an anchor locker or a bunched-up fishing net)."

Caulerpa has been found in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. In an attempt to contain the spread, Biosecurity New Zealand has established four Caulerpa restricted zones at Great Barrier and one at the Mercury Islands. We are concerned there may be unidentified infestations of Caulerpa elsewhere in the Marine Park.

Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) is currently developing the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Fisheries Plan. Thousands of the recent public submissions objected to the proposed trawl “corridors” around Little Barrier Island, Great Barrier Island and Mercury Islands. Bottom trawling, scallop dredging and Danish seining are all mobile bottom contact fishing methods which FNZ proposes should be allowed in these areas.

The term “corridors” evokes narrow lanes, which we are led to understand is a misrepresentation of what FNZ is proposing. However, even if they were genuine narrow corridors, fragments of *Caulerpa* are easily carried on the currents so there are unacceptable risks associated with allowing the use of these bottom contact fishing techniques to break established *Caulerpa* beds into particles which will drift in the water column. Considering the huge volume of water that flows up and down the Colville Channel twice a day, permitting use of bottom contact fishing methods presents an unacceptably high risk that *Caulerpa* could quickly spread throughout the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park unless urgent action is taken. See the appendix for a diagram of currents indicated by scallop larval dispersal data.

Another issue is the lack of research describing this invasive species' impact on the wider ecosystem, particularly on species such as scallops, crayfish and mussels, which have already been pushed to record low populations. The loss of a healthy habitat to *Caulerpa* may mean invertebrate and bi-valve populations can never establish enough density to recover.

If continued levels of destructive industrial effort are permitted in these “corridors”, it seems unlikely an anchoring ban in four selected zones will be enough to contain the spread of *Caulerpa*. MPI, Biosecurity NZ and Fisheries New Zealand must collaborate with other parties to implement a more effective solution urgently.

Until *Caulerpa* is contained, bottom contact fishing methods must be banned from the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

Minister, we urge you to acknowledge the mandatory obligation you have when making decisions to take into account the cumulative effects of fishing, the need to act in a precautionary manner, and to give effect to sections 5, 8 and 9, and other sections of the Fisheries Act 96.

Along with these Fisheries Act responsibilities, it is an offence under section 52 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 to knowingly spread an unwanted organism such as *Caulerpa*. Once *Caulerpa* is established in the ecosystem, removal will be almost impossible.

We urge you to prioritise the health of the wider marine ecosystem by applying section 11 of the Fisheries Act 1996 to remove bottom trawling, scallop dredging and Danish seining from the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. In doing so, you will reduce the risks of wider infestation on the northeast coast by removing three fishing methods with a high potential to spread Caulerpa.

Nā mātou noa, nā.

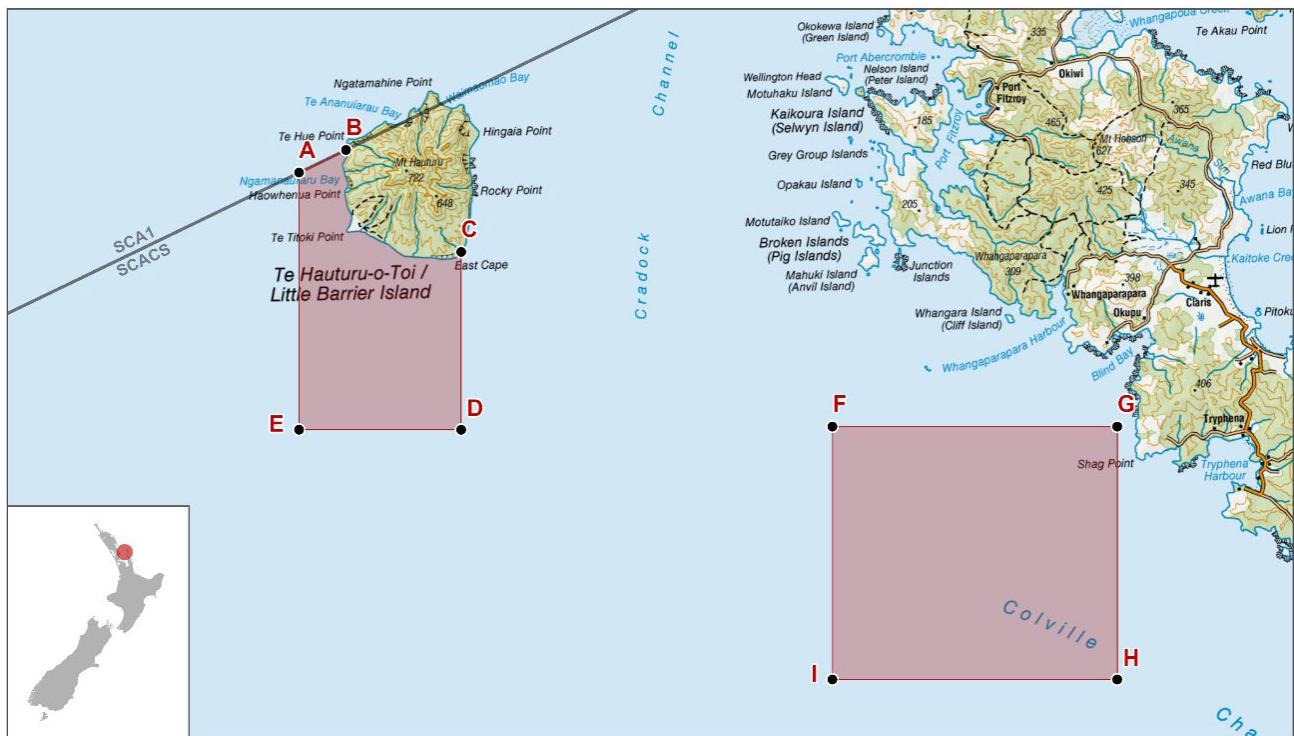
Signed by the following Hauraki Gulf Alliance founding partners:



Supported by:



Appendix 1:



Two defined areas were left open to commercial and recreational scallop harvest: one at Hauturu/Little Barrier and one in the Colville Channel. Source: Fisheries New Zealand

Appendix 2:

5. Patterns of dispersal in the Coromandel fishery

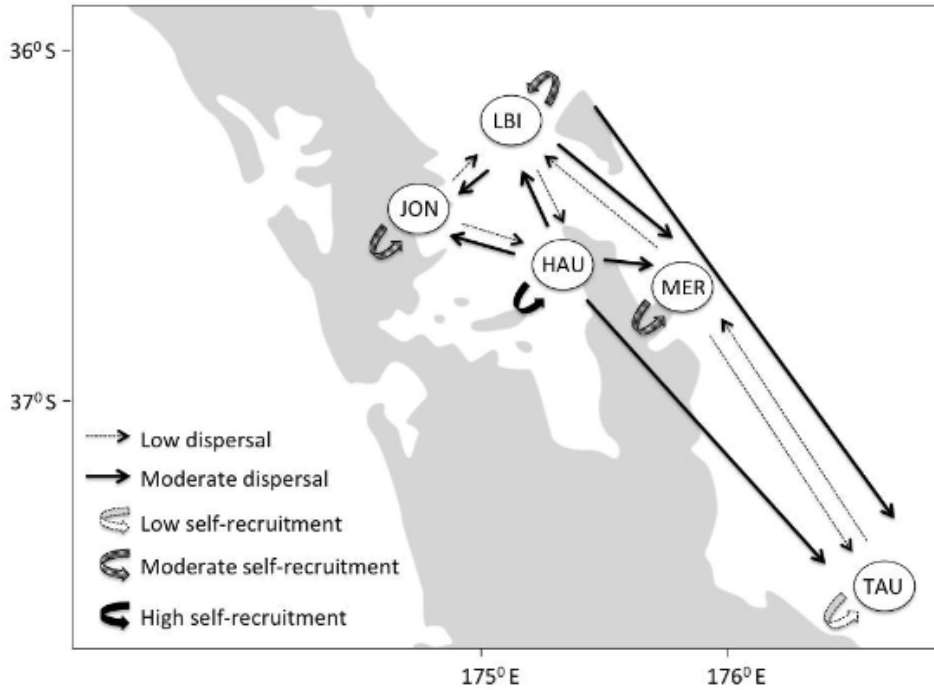


Figure 5.11 Expected relationships between locations sampled in Coromandel with estimated levels of larval dispersal and self-recruitment (low, moderate and high) indicated by the arrows. Circles are locations sampled. [Spatial and temporal genetic structure of the New Zealand scallop *Pecten novaezelandiae*: a multidisciplinary perspective by Catarine Nunes Soares Silva \(P 107\).](#)