



Hauraki Gulf Trawl Corridors

November 2023

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

After a century of bottom trawling the Hauraki Gulf is seriously degraded, making it increasingly vulnerable to pollution, sedimentation, invasive species, and climate change.

Trawlers and Danish seiners are currently destroying vital habitats and marine life on the seafloor.

Around 84% of the Gulf community want bottom trawling banned from the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

In late 2023 Fisheries New Zealand consulted on the creation of 'trawl corridors,' where trawling and seining could continue in the Marine Park.

There were no proposals to reduce fishing pressure or catch limits, and no intent to protect sensitive areas important to juvenile fish.

We are already witnessing widespread depletion of sea life within our lifetimes. We must reduce our impact on the marine ecosystem, otherwise we won't have a healthy and abundant ocean to pass onto future generations.

A THRIVING MARINE PARK

In November 2023 the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, LegaSea, New Zealand Angling & Casting Association and New Zealand Underwater submitted

in support of no mobile, bottom contact fishing in the Marine Park. Option Zero.

Option Zero is a complete ban on bottom trawling, Danish seining and dredging. Limit catches so fish populations can regrow. And, reclassify the Marine Park as a Type 2 Marine Protected Area (MPA) to protect the seabed from all bottom crushing methods.

The Minister for Oceans and Fisheries must designate the Park as a separate Fisheries Management Area so catches can be reduced to suit the fish population size within the Park.

Without lower catch limits trawling will intensify within the 'corridors'. Neighbouring regions would also be affected as commercial vessels target fishing in Bream Bay, Coromandel and Bay of Plenty.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

We expect the Minister to make his decisions in early 2024 on the trawl corridors, which are part of the overall Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Fisheries Plan. These decisions will have a significant impact on the marine environment.

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Option Zero

An alternative strategy

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park was established in 2000 to protect and enhance the environment, since then it has become more degraded. If we want future generations to enjoy a vibrant marine environment we must do more to protect the seabed.

Between September and December 2023, Fisheries New Zealand consulted on four options to confine bottom trawling and Danish seining to large areas called 'trawl corridors' within the Marine Park.

None of the four options completely ban all trawling, seining and dredging from the Park, as recommended by the Sea Change Stakeholder Working Group in 2016. Over 100 organisations in the Hauraki Gulf Alliance continue to advocate for the ban.

In a separate, related process Conservation officials consulted on 19 new marine protected areas (MPAs) for the Park, with submissions due in November.

These are important issues that will impact several million people who regularly enjoy access to the Hauraki Gulf and northeast coast waters. That's why an alternative plan, Option Zero, was submitted to the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries in November.

OPTION ZERO

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, LegaSea, New Zealand Angling & Casting Association and New Zealand Underwater collaborated to develop Option Zero.

It's important to rebuild fish populations to more natural levels because this will help restore biodiversity and ecosystem function. In making his decisions the Minister must take a holistic approach, considering both fisheries management and marine protection in the Park.

The Marine Park extends from Te Arai in the north, past Coromandel to Waihi. The management area for many of the species commonly caught in the Gulf extends from North Cape to East Cape. The proposed 19 new MPAs are all within these Park boundaries.

Officials are ignoring the combined, knock-on effects of the separate proposals for trawl corridors and MPAs.

There's no intention to create a separate fisheries management area (FMA) for the Gulf, so commercial fishing will be concentrated in the trawl corridors. And, because there is no proposal to reduce catch limits for species currently caught within the Park, industrial fishing will inevitably shift out of the corridors. This means more fish will be trawled and seined from waters around east Northland, Coromandel and Bay of Plenty.



Option Zero is:

1. No bottom trawling, Danish seining or dredging.
2. Designate an FMA for the Gulf, so catch limits can be adjusted to suit the smaller area and so fishing effort doesn't simply shift elsewhere.

FISHING IS IMPORTANT

Option Zero recognises that commercial fishing is important to New Zealanders, for jobs and fish supply. However, there is no justification for continued use of destructive fishing methods in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

Option Zero is a pragmatic step towards transitioning from bulk harvest, destructive fishing methods to more innovative, lower impact techniques such as longlining and potting.

On the west coast of the North Island there's been a trawl exclusion zone since 2008 to protect the critically endangered Māui dolphin. Since then, the snapper population has more than doubled in size.

This gives us hope of what can be achieved if mobile, bottom contact fishing is banned, allowing marine life to thrive.

If we can remove destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling, dredging and Danish seining from an area that has been a Marine Park since 2000, this will set a powerful precedent for the rest of New Zealand.



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