



B24-0212

Tēnā koe,

Changes to fisheries sustainability measures for the 2024 April round

I write to inform you of the decisions I have made on a range of sustainability measures across several fish stocks.

My decisions include changes to Total Allowable Catch (TAC) settings, non-commercial allowances, and Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) settings for ten fish stocks. Attached to this letter are my decisions along with a brief rationale for each of the changes I have decided on.

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

Where there were opportunities for increasing utilisation within sustainable limits, I have decided to implement appropriate increases to catch limits to reflect this. On the other hand, where sustainability is at risk, I have taken appropriate management action to protect those fisheries resources.

This sustainability round included proposed changes for several highly valued fisheries, including spiny rock lobster stocks in Gisborne, Southland, and Fiordland, and the recreational pāua fishery in the wider Kaikōura area. I would like to express my thanks to tangata whenua, stakeholders, and members of the public who provided their views on these fisheries. Your feedback and submissions have been important in helping to inform my decisions on their management.

The changes to the TACs of southern blue whiting (SBW 6B) and spiny rock lobster (CRA 3, and CRA 8), as well as the in-season increase for southern bluefin tuna (STN 1) will come into effect at the start of the new fishing year on 1 April 2024.

The changes to the recreational daily limit for CRA 3 and the implementation of a recreational season for the Kaikōura pāua fishery will be published by *Gazette* Notice later in April.

The changes to the TACs of silver warehou (SWA 4), gemfish (SKI 3 and SKI 7), and STN 1 will be published by *Gazette* Notice later this year to come into effect at the start of the new fishing year on 1 October 2024.

In addition, I have approved the use of management procedures for spiny rock lobster in CRA 7 and CRA 8.

These changes are outlined in the attached summary report. The decision documents that informed my decisions are available on the Fisheries New Zealand website here: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/consultations/review-of-sustainability-measures-for-fisheries-april-2024-round/>

Nāku iti noa, nā,



Hon Shane Jones
Minister for Oceans and Fisheries



Summary report on decisions for the 2024 April sustainability round

Gemfish / tiikati, maka-taharaki, maka-tikati

SKI 3, SKI 7 – South Island, Chatham Rise, West Coast of Taranaki & Wellington

I have decided to increase the TACs, allowances for other sources of mortality caused by fishing, and TACCs for SKI 3 and SKI 7 as follows:

Stock	Setting	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
				Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
SKI 3	Previous	1,103	1,091	1	0	11
	New	1,433 (↑ 330)	1,418 (↑ 327)	1	0	14 (↑ 3)
SKI 7	Previous	1,103	1,091	1	0	11
	New	1,433 (↑ 330)	1,418 (↑ 327)	1	0	14 (↑ 3)

Gemfish in SKI 3 and SKI 7 are considered a single biological stock and are typically managed together. They are predominantly caught by commercial fishers, with most catch taken as non-target catch by vessels using midwater and bottom trawl gear targeting squid, hoki, scampi, and ling. In making my decisions, I have considered the best available information which strongly suggests a substantial and continued increase in the abundance of gemfish in SKI 3 and SKI 7. My decision provides an appropriate utilisation opportunity for the commercial sector by increasing the TACC, in line with this observed increase in abundance.

This is the fourth TAC increase since 2018/19 after a strong increase in CPUE indices observed since 2016/17. I have taken a measured approach to setting these limits, acknowledging that there is still some uncertainty regarding the status of these stocks.

I acknowledge that some commercial stakeholders requested even greater increases to the SKI 3 and SKI 7 TACCs (40% increases). However, further information regarding the status of both stocks in relation to the management target would be desirable before making a change of that magnitude to the management settings of the two stocks. It is likely that this information will be available in 2024/25 through a planned stock assessment for SKI 3 and SKI 7.

Silver warehou

SWA 4 – Eastern Chatham Rise and Sub-Antarctic

I have decided to increase the TAC, allowance for other sources of mortality caused by fishing, and TACC for SWA 4 as follows:

Setting	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	4,545	4,500	0	0	45
New	5,227 (↑ 682)	5,175 (↑ 675)	0	0	52 (↑ 7)

Silver warehou is a moderately important commercial species (with a 2023 export value of \$24 million) that is almost exclusively (>99%) caught by the deepwater trawl fleet.

Information from 2022 and 2023 research indicates that the biomass of SWA 4 has remained at a relatively high level for an extended period. Given the apparent positive status of this stock, my decision provides an appropriate utilisation opportunity for the commercial sector by increasing the TACC, in line with increased abundance.

While there is some targeted fishing, silver warehou is primarily a non-target species. Submissions from the commercial fishing industry expressed support for a TACC increase, noting the ongoing abundance of the stock. The TACC increase I have decided on may enable commercial fishers to more efficiently fish target stocks where SWA 4 is also caught by reducing the likelihood of incurring deemed values.

I acknowledge the desire from some commercial stakeholders for an even greater TACC increase for SWA 4, and for the increase to also be applied to the adjacent SWA 3 stock. However, I am also aware that better information on the status of both stocks would be desirable before considering further changes to management settings. I encourage FNZ and commercial stakeholders to work together to investigate how the stocks can be better monitored.

I have also asked FNZ to review the deemed value rates for the SWA 3 and SWA 4 stocks as part of the October 2024 sustainability round.

Southern blue whiting

SBW 6B – Bounty Platform, Sub-Antarctic

I have decided to increase the TAC, allowance for other sources of mortality caused by fishing, and TACC for SBW 6B as follows:

Setting	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	2,309	2,264	0	0	45
New	4,988 (↑ 2,679)	4,888 (↑ 2,624)	0	0	100 (↑ 55)

Southern blue whiting is a deepwater species which is most abundant in sub-Antarctic waters. The commercial fishery is a seasonal and high-volume target fishery that provides export revenue (approximately \$20 million in 2023).

The management approach for the Bounty Platform southern blue whiting fishery involves recommending catch limits based on the application of a 'Harvest Control Rule' to the results from an acoustic survey of biomass.

The results of the acoustic survey in August 2023 indicate that southern blue whiting biomass has increased since 2016. In addition, ageing of fish from the survey confirms there has been strong recruitment into the fishery from fish born in 2018.

Based on this information, I have decided to increase the TAC for SBW 6B to 4,988 tonnes. Given the positive status of this stock, my decision provides an appropriate utilisation opportunity for the commercial sector by increasing the TACC, in line with increased abundance.

This increase was supported by submissions, which were primarily from commercial interests.

Southern bluefin tuna / ika tira iti

STN 1 – All of New Zealand

I have decided to increase the TAC, increase the allowance for recreational fishing, and generate additional ACE for southern bluefin tuna (STN 1) within the current October fishing year as follows:

Setting	TAC	TACC	Additional ACE	Allowances		
				Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	1,102	1,046	-	2	34	20
New	1,288 (↑ 186)	1,046	↑ 151	2	69 (↑ 35)	20

I have also decided to increase the TAC, the allowance for recreational fishing, and the TACC for STN 1 for the full fishing year starting 1 October as follows:

Setting	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	1,102	1,046	2	34	20
New	1,288 (↑ 186)	1,197 (↑ 151)	2	69 (↑ 35)	20

In making my decisions, I note that a recent increase in New Zealand's national allocation, as determined by the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (**CCSBT**), has provided an opportunity for further utilisation of this stock within New Zealand's domestic catch settings.

At its latest meeting in October 2023, the CCSBT agreed to increase the global total allowable catch for the three-year block from 2024 to 2026 by 3,000 tonnes in accordance with recommendations from its scientific committee. As a result of this, New Zealand's national allocation has increased by 186 tonnes. To give effect to the CCSBT decision, I have decided to increase the TAC of STN 1 in line with the CCSBT's allocation increase. Within this, I have decided to increase the recreational allowance to provide for the increased recreational interest in this stock, and I have provided for increased commercial utilisation. This increase will provide a significant boost for the industry by enabling greater export revenue over the next few years.

I note that some submitters raised concerns about the effectiveness of current recreational controls in this fishery. The increase to the recreational allowance is consistent with the most recent survey estimates of recreational catch, and recognises that recreational catch rates have been increasing in recent years. My officials will continue to monitor recreational catch in STN 1, with further consideration of revised recreational management measures in late 2024, once the latest catch estimates from the dedicated STN survey are available. I note that any additional measures could be in place in time for the 2025 season.

I also note the concerns raised by environmental NGOs about the risk of this change for seabirds and other protected species. I recognise that this change could result in increased effort in the fishery and that this could pose a higher risk to some seabird species. However, I am aware that information regarding the magnitude of any potential change in effort is inconclusive. There are initiatives currently underway to continue reducing interactions of seabirds in the surface longline fishery including the implementation of a voluntary code of practice for the East Coast South Island fishery, and an uptick in the adoption of hook-shielding devices.

I consider that these changes for STN 1 will not pose any significant risk to sustainability and will best meet New Zealand's international and domestic obligations for managing this stock.

Kaikōura recreational pāua fishery

PAU 3A and PAU 7 from Marfells beach to the Conway River

I have decided to re-open the wider Kaikōura pāua fishery to recreational fishing for a period of two months from 22 April to 21 June 2024.

This fishery has been subject to various closures since the 2016 Kaikōura earthquake to support its recovery. The season I have decided on provides another opportunity for harvest after the rebuild in pāua abundance that has occurred following these closures. The two-month autumn season follows a similar approach to last year. The other recreational fishing controls put in place last year will continue to apply, including a daily limit of three blackfoot pāua per fisher, and a minimum legal-size limit (MLS) of 125 mm shell length for blackfoot pāua. Most customary management areas will remain closed to pāua fishing and, in the southern Oaro-Haumuri Taiāpure (an area of significant customary fishing importance), a lower daily limit of two blackfoot pāua per fisher and a larger MLS of 135 mm for blackfoot pāua will continue to apply.

Submissions on the proposal noted the need to manage catch in a manner consistent with the recreational allowances set for PAU 3A and PAU 7, while acknowledging the importance of this fishery to recreational fishers. I consider my decision achieves these outcomes given the trend of decreasing recreational catch evident over the past two seasons. Fisheries New Zealand will commission an independent survey to monitor recreational pāua catch over the two-month season, which will provide weekly estimates to iwi and stakeholders to consider potential adjustments if catch exceeds expectations.

I am advised that new stock assessment information will become available over the next few months for the PAU 3A part of the fishery. This will inform a review of the TAC, the TACC, and the allowances set for PAU 3A, including the allowance for recreational fishing, which Fisheries New Zealand plans to undertake for the October sustainability round.

Spiny rock lobster / Kōura papatea

CRA 7, CRA 8 – Otago, Southland, Fiordland, Stewart Island, & Auckland Islands

I have decided to confirm the use of management procedures in both the CRA 7 (Otago) and CRA 8 (Southern) rock lobster fisheries.

I have also decided to increase the TAC, allowance for recreational fishing, allowance for other sources of mortality caused by fishing, and the TACC for CRA 8 as below:

Setting for CRA 8	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	Other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	1,453	1,251	30	33	139
New	1,601 (↑ 148)	1,392 (↑ 141)	30	39 (↑ 6)	140 (↑ 1)

In making my decisions, I note that the best available science suggests these stocks are in good health. This reflects positively on the efforts taken by participants in these fisheries to rebuild biomass over the past few decades, including the successful operation of management procedures in both fisheries until 2020.

The management procedures are expected to provide several benefits for management of both fisheries, including helping to maintain the combined stocks at or above maximum sustainable yield (MSY) until the next stock assessment and review of these management procedures in 2027/28. Operation of the management procedures also provides a more established management approach allowing for faster responses to changes in stock abundance and greater certainty for stakeholders.

My decision to increase the TAC of CRA 8 considers the results of the most recent rapid assessment, output of the management procedure, record high CPUE for the stock, and a trend of increasing abundance.

Within the TAC, I have decided to increase the allowance for recreational fishing to ensure it provides the most accurate reflection possible of current recreational harvest. I acknowledge the opposition of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to this change and their concern that recreational fishing is constraining their ability to meet customary needs and to exercise kaitiakitanga. However, I have given particular regard to how they have said

they exercise their customary practices and kaitiakitanga, and the distribution of mātaimai reserves across the fishery, where tāngata whenua can directly manage the rock lobster fishery in accordance with customary practice. Considering all these factors and given the current good health and increasing abundance of rock lobster in CRA 8, I consider it appropriate to make an allowance that reflects the estimated current recreational harvest.

I note that a number of submitters commented on the management and measurement of recreational harvest in CRA 8. My officials will continue to monitor recreational fishing in CRA 8 and take action if required to ensure overall fishing remains sustainable.

My decision also considered the potential economic benefits for Ngāi Tahu Whānui and communities in Southland, Fiordland, and Stewart Island associated with allowing for increased commercial utilisation.

I note that the next rapid assessment update for CRA 7 & 8 and operation of the approved management procedures in 2024 will provide an opportunity to inform a review of catch settings for April 2025 if required.

Spiny rock lobster / Kōura papatea CRA 3 – Gisborne

I have decided to decrease the TAC, allowance for recreational fishing, allowance for other sources of mortality caused by fishing, and the TACC for CRA 3 as below:

Setting	TAC	TACC	Allowances		
			Customary Māori	Recreational	All other mortality caused by fishing
Previous	302	195	20	12	75
New	244 (↓ 58)	156 (↓ 39)	20	8 (↓ 4)	60 (↓ 15)

I have also decided to decrease the recreational daily limit of spiny rock lobster in CRA 3 from six to three spiny rock lobsters per fisher per day, as below:

	Combined daily limit of spiny and packhorse rock lobster	Maximum spiny rock lobster daily limit
Previous	6	6
New	6	3 (↓ 3)

I have decided to implement a 58-tonne reduction to the TAC. This is a modification of the 54-tonne reduction option that was consulted on and responds to the preliminary results of the 2022/23 National Panel Survey of Recreational Fishers, which became available following consultation. The results suggest that recreational harvest has reduced, which was also highlighted in some submissions. Given this updated information, and my desire that all users contribute in efforts to ensure sustainability of this important shared fishery, I have decided to reduce the recreational allowance (a 4-tonne reduction) alongside a corresponding reduction to the recreational daily bag limit. I consider that a bag limit reduction, reducing the recreational daily limit from six to three spiny rock lobsters per fisher per day, will help ensure that recreational catch does not exceed the allowance. I have also decided to reduce the TACC by 20%, a 39-tonne reduction.

I acknowledge the significant uncertainty in the available information on the current status of the stock. However, I have been advised of concerns regarding the health of this stock especially given the significant impacts of the recent cyclones across the Gisborne region. In making my decision I have considered the best available information, the uncertainty associated with this information, the risk that the cyclones may have impacted the stock, and the risk to the stock if the current TAC is maintained.

The combination of Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle in January and February 2023 caused unprecedented damage across parts of the Gisborne region. The marine environment experienced significant inflows of fresh water, increased sedimentation, and input of land-based debris. There were anecdotal reports indicating that some commercial fishers experienced significant impacts to their operation, such as reduced catch and lobster pots encountering debris. The post-cyclone marine surveys of the CRA 3 region have indicated that some areas have been impacted by the cyclones, while other areas appear to have been more resilient. While these surveys did not specifically look at spiny rock lobster, they indicate that there may have been localised impacts to both biomass and supporting habitat. However, a lack of previous surveys in the area means this is uncertain.

The 2023 rapid assessment update¹ showed that the vulnerable biomass² of CRA 3 had increased to 50% above the reference level over the last two years. However, as the 2023 rapid update assessment was informed by an abundance index that has not been updated since 2019 and was only informed by one month of post cyclone data, the November 2023 Fisheries Assessment Plenary Working Group concluded that estimates of stock status it provided do not reflect the impacts of Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle. Furthermore, the update showed that about three-quarters of the stock's vulnerable biomass was in the northern region of CRA 3, where the fishery is considered more susceptible to cyclone impacts due to higher river output and associated sediment deposition. As the cyclone impacts on CRA 3 cannot be quantified, the status of the CRA 3 stock cannot be reliably estimated relative to the target reference level.

I note that the upcoming 2024 CRA 3 stock assessment, scheduled to be completed by August 2024, will provide additional information on the state of the fishery. However, as this will only encompass one year of post cyclone information, it is unlikely the full impact of the cyclones will be known for at least another three to five years.

During consultation virtually all submitters agreed there was a need for a reduction in the amount of commercial catch that can be taken from the fishery, however, there were differing views on both the magnitude of the reduction needed and how such a reduction should be implemented. Several submitters raised the under catch of the TACC in recent years, that I acknowledge is partially explained by COVID, unfavourable fishing weather, and the recent biotoxin closures.

On balance, given the importance of this shared fishery to the region, I consider that the risks discussed are significant enough to warrant a reduction to the TAC. However, I also note that these risks cannot be quantified at the present time. Therefore, I consider that a moderate reduction to the TAC is the most appropriate way to address both the uncertainty and associated risks to the stock until the results of the upcoming CRA 3 stock assessment become available.

I acknowledge, and appreciate, that the New Zealand Rock Lobster Industry Council (**NZ RLIC**) and the Tairāwhiti Rock Lobster Industry Association (**TRLIA**), with the support of their members and other industry participants, offered to shelve 30% of CRA 3 Annual Catch Entitlement³ from April 2024, in conjunction with the TAC being maintained. I commend this proposal as such voluntary initiatives can increase the agility of the fisheries system, and demonstrate the industry's commitment to collective stewardship and acting in the long-term interests of this important shared fishery. I acknowledge the use of shelving in other fisheries in other situations, however, the TAC is the primary tool to ensure sustainability and I am required to set a TAC that satisfies the requirements of the Fisheries Act 1996, and Annual Catch Entitlement shelving cannot be used to justify a TAC that does not meet those requirements. I note that the TACC reduction is less than the amount of ACE that industry offered to shelve. Therefore, in addition to this TAC change, I encourage FNZ and industry to work together on any additional measures that may benefit this stock.

¹ Rapid assessment updates differ from full stock assessments. They repeat the previous base case stock assessment model(s) with all the same model settings and assumptions, only updating inputs (for example, additional years of catch, length frequencies, and tag-recapture data). Full stock assessments are far more extensive, as they involve a full review of all the data offered to the model and of the model itself, rather than an update of previously used data. Full updates are generally carried out every five years. Having rapid updates carried out between these full assessments provides more regular information to support responsive management.

² Vulnerable biomass refers to that portion of a stock's biomass that is available to fisheries, i.e., legally harvestable adult rock lobsters. Also called exploitable biomass or recruited biomass. For rock lobsters this is limited to male and female fish above the Minimum Legal Size at the beginning of the autumn-winter season, excluding berried females.

³ ACE shelving is a formal agreement among quota owners in a stock to forgo harvesting a specified proportion of the TACC by each transferring an agreed proportion of their ACE to a separate account.