



Summary of the latest Government decisions on proposed amendments to the Fisheries Act 1996

The Government has made commitments to lift New Zealand's productivity and economic growth – increasing opportunities and prosperity for all New Zealanders, including the seafood sector.

In February 2024, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries (the Minister) established the Seafood Industry Forum to identify barriers and opportunities for growth. Operational and regulatory cost pressures were reported as holding industry back and making it difficult to invest in growth and innovation.

In September 2024, the Minister asked officials to develop a package of proposals for changes to the Fisheries Act 1996 to increase the speed, certainty and transparency of decision making and remove regulations that are overly complex, duplicative or impose unnecessary compliance costs. These proposals were informed by discussions with the Seafood Industry Forum.

The proposed changes respond to the Government's goals and take advantage of new data and analytical tools to improve how we manage New Zealand's fisheries.

Public consultation took place from 12 February to 11 April 2025 and MPI received nearly 27,000 submissions. Feedback from submitters was reflected in officials' advice to the Minister on final policy decisions.

Cabinet considered a range of measures and has agreed to amend the Fisheries Act 1996 to progress the following proposals

To improve responsiveness and flexibility in the fisheries management system, the proposals:

- Enable the Minister to make one decision to set catch limits for a period of up to 5-years, following consultation.
- Allow the Minister, following consultation, to approve management procedures that would set out how, when, and why catch limits should be adjusted over a period of up to 5-years.
- Provide more certainty and transparency about how we manage low and medium information stocks.
- Clarify the Minister's ability to take social, economic and cultural factors into account when setting catch limits.
- Allow the Minister to recognise and give weight to commercial non-regulatory measures proposed by the fishing industry when setting catch limits.
- Allow additional carry-forward of uncaught annual catch entitlement (ACE) for a fish stock, for a fishing year, in exceptional circumstances (including for rock lobster).
- Provide greater certainty for fishers and other stakeholders that key fisheries management decisions will not be challenged after a certain time.
- Separate the function of decisions to set catch limits from management of broader effects of fishing on the environment, so that both functions can be carried out efficiently and effectively.



To provide greater protection for on-board camera footage and other camera programme improvements, the proposals:

- Exempt on-board camera footage from the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). Footage will continue to be used for fisheries management purposes, and other information derived from camera footage would remain subject to the OIA (such as a written summary). Information on protected species captures will continue to be published quarterly on MPI's website.
- Exclude vessels less than eight metres in overall length, set net vessels using the mothership and tender model, and bottom longline vessels greater than 32 metres in overall length from the requirement to have on-board cameras.
- Clarify that on-board cameras are required to operate during fishing, related activities, and while transiting to and from fishing locations. Cameras would not be required to operate outside these activities, which includes while at anchor, drifting, or powered down.

The proposals include new rules for commercial fishers that set out when Quota Management System fish must be landed and when they can be returned to sea. This includes amending the Fisheries Act 1996 to:

- Enable 'monitored returns', which would allow commercial fishers to return QMS fish to the sea when monitored by MPI observers or on-board camera system, and balance those returns with annual catch entitlement or incur deemed values.
- Reduce verification and reporting complexities by removing 18 existing landing exceptions for species that require review under the Fisheries Amendment Act 2022.
- Adjust the commercial catch limit and other sources of mortality allowance within the Total Allowable catch for the 18 existing landing exceptions proposed to be fully or partially removed to reflect that fishers may now need to land some, or all, of this catch and cover it with ACE.
- Enable the Minister to permit commercial fishers to deliberately release QMS fish at depth using fishing gear or technologies that have little to no impact on fish survival.
- Amend the current defence for commercial fishers to return or abandon QMS fish when a fishery officer is present to authorise and supervise the return to make it more workable by removing the requirement for the fishery officer to be present when the fish was taken.
- A technical amendment to simplify the legislative implementation process for the required reviews of commercial finfish minimum legal-size exceptions.

Next steps

Officials are currently working to draft legislation. The Minister intends to introduce an Amendment Bill to the House which will be referred to Select Committee. There will be further opportunity for consultation and feedback on the proposals during the Select Committee process.