

Coromandel Scallops proposed changes for 2013-14

The Ministry for Primary Industries is consulting on an increase to the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), non-commercial allowances and Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for Coromandel Scallops. Submissions are due by 8 February 2013.

The fishery and current allowances

The Coromandel Scallop (SCA CS) fishing area extends from Little Barrier to Motiti Island in the Bay of Plenty, with the mainstay fishery off Mercury Island. This fishery entered the Quota Management System (QMS) in 2002 and was added to the Second Schedule of the Fisheries Act 1996, to allow for in-season increases in the TAC and associated Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE). Catch levels revert to the base TAC at the end of each season. In 2002 the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) was set at 48 tonne (t) meatweight and the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) at 22 t. Allowances were made for other mortality (11 t), recreational and customary interests (7.5 t ea).

The commercial season is from 15 July to 21 December, recreational from 1 September to 31 March. Around seven commercial vessels operate in this fishery, and there are 10 quota holders. Since 1995 a 90mm Minimum Legal Size (MLS) has applied to commercial take, a 100mm MLS applies to recreational harvest.

Commercial landings and in-season TAC increases have exceeded the 22 t TACC every year since 2002. Last year the Minister approved an in-season catch limit increase to 325 t, reverting to 22 t on 30 March 2013. 2012-13 season landings are projected to reach 150 t.

The in-season TACs and ACE are based on estimates of Current Annual Yield (CAY), derived from annual biomass surveys of beds utilised by commercial fishers. Landings have not reached the in-season increase limit since 2006-07. In 2010 fishers cautioned the Shellfish Assessment Working Group about the discrepancy between the high CAY estimates and catch, they did not believe it was possible to catch the CAY¹. MPI's justification is that the estimates only apply to surveyed beds, and that additional biomass may exist in unsurveyed areas and commercial-prohibited areas.

MPI acknowledge that a recent dredge efficiency survey suggests that biomass and yield may have been overestimated in past surveys. The most recent stock information is derived from a biomass survey conducted in April-May 2012. The survey includes biomass from a new, relatively large bed in the Hauraki Gulf. This seems to be contributing to the bulk of estimated available yield.

The current proposals are being promoted to overcome the \$100k annual survey costs, shared evenly between industry and MPI, and other associated costs. Reviewing the TAC is consistent with Fisheries Plan Group 2 stock management, that enables annual yield to be "maximised" while maintaining sustainability.

Scallops

Scallops are considered to be highly productive, move short distances and be relatively short-lived (4 to 7 years). Scallops can be found in waters up to 60m, but are more common in 10 to 45m. Abundance varies between and within years. Recruitment is highly variable between years. Major sources of uncertainty include assumptions about dredge efficiency, growth rates, and natural mortality between surveys and the start of the fishing year (15 July). Also uncertain is predicting the average conversion of meatweight from greenweight and the effects of dredging, on both incidental mortality and recruitment.

The Proposals

MPI propose three management options, including the status quo (Option 1). Options 2 and 3 increase the TAC from 48 to 96 and 131 t respectively. Proposed TACCs are 65 t (Option 2) and 100 t (Option 3). Proposed recreational and customary allowances increase from 7.5 to 10 t. There is no proposed increase to the existing 11 t allowance for other mortality.

¹ SCA CS plenary report. Ministry for Primary Industries. November 2011.

MPI prefer an increased TAC/TACC with no increase in the current allowance for other mortality, but do not specify Option 2 or 3. Industry prefer Option 3. No specific input was received from iwi on the options to be included in the IPP. NZSFC did not respond to a request for input into IPP options.

Table 1: Proposed TACs, TACCs and allowances for SCA CS

Option	Allowances				Other sources of fishing related mortality (t)
	TAC (t)	TACC (t)	Māori Customary (t)	Recreational (t)	
Option 1 (Status Quo)	48	22	7.5	7.5	11
Option 2	96	65	10	10	11
Option 3	131	100	10	10	11

Issues to address in a submission

- Coromandel Scallops are an important fishery for the public's broad recreational and customary interests, not just fishing interests.
- Although the in-season increase and commercial landings have exceeded the 22 t TACC since 2002, actual landings have never reached the in-season increased tonnage.
- To save around \$50k per annum, MPI now propose to grant quota rights to commercial interests, rather than just increasing the amount of Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE), in this public fishery. ACE is time-limited, to one year. History has taught us that quota is for much longer. And we know how hard commercials fight to retain those rights once granted!
- Annual surveys enable some level of stock monitoring in a highly variable fishery. It is important to maintain high-level monitoring given that recruitment is highly variable between years and commercial effort is not constrained by the in-season TACC increases.
- MPI argue in the IPP that for the last three years commercial landings have been constrained by processing capacity and/or by application of the "CPUE limit rule".
- Industry have voluntarily introduced a "CPUE limit rule" management scheme, to "improve utilisation while maintaining sustainability". Once a specified lower CPUE limit of scallops has been reached, fishing in that area stops for the season. This rule has been in place for three years and applies to all vessels in the fishery. There is no detail as to what that "specified lower CPUE limit" has been previously, or what it is for the current season.
- MPI and the Coromandel Scallop Fishermens' Association (CSFA) are evaluating the "CPUE limit rule" as an alternative approach to survey-dependent management and in-season TAC adjustments. This development is a concern for non-commercial interests as it excludes input and participation by non-commercial interests into the stock evaluation process. An independent survey is preferable and more akin to 'best available information' as required by the Minister to lawfully manage a fishery.
- No specific harvest strategies, including target and reference levels, or monitoring programmes have been agreed by MPI and stakeholders.
- The discovery of a new, significant bed, in deeper water of the Hauraki Gulf seems to be contributing the bulk of biomass (and confidence) to permanently increase the TAC and TACC. It is feasible to retain the existing in-season survey/TAC increase process for a set period (say five years) to better determine if this bed is viable and truly able to contribute to the available biomass in the Coromandel Scallop fishery.
- An unpublished report (project SAP200913) to model the efficiency of box dredges used in northern Scallop fisheries was completed by NIWA in December 2011. Stakeholders need access to this report as preliminary results suggest that dredge efficiency was previously underestimated (2004-10), resulting in overestimation of biomass and yield².

² SCA CS plenary report. Ministry for Primary Industries. November 2011.

- Preliminary results from the large-scale multi-species and Bay of Plenty surveys indicate recreational harvest is below the existing recreational allowance.
- Any increase in the overall allowance will not have a direct benefit for recreational fishers as no daily bag limit increase is proposed. Therefore this proposal benefits commercial interests, through increased quota allocations and the ability to “maximise” those benefits.
- MPI also benefit from reduced survey and management costs. Less MPI involvement could hasten the move to a more commercially-managed fishery. Unlikely to be of benefit to recreational interests.

Recommendations

- The NZSFC submit in favour of retaining the status quo (Option 1). This submission to include reasons why the NZSFC is against the proposed increase of the Total Allowable Catch and Total Allowable Commercial Catch in the Coromandel Scallop fishery.
- The NZSFC propose that the in-season survey/consultation process continue until there is better understanding of the abundance and available biomass in the new Hauraki Gulf Scallop bed.
- The NZSFC identify and work with its constituent members and others, that have an interest in the Coromandel Scallop fishery, to develop a submission.
- The NZSFC advocate that MPI work with stakeholders to determine specific harvest strategies (including target and reference levels) and monitoring programmes appropriate for the Coromandel Scallop fishery.
- The NZSFC request details of the data collection and operation of the “CPUE limit rule” in the Coromandel Scallop fishery.
- The NZSFC continue to oppose the use of very high TACs in variable fish stocks, because in practical terms there is no management in place.
- The NZSFC request a copy of the report from Project SAP200913 (*Bain et al.* 2011) that modelled the efficiency of box dredges used in the northeastern Scallop fisheries.

The full discussion Document is available at
<http://www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Consultations/default.htm>

The submission deadline is 8 February 2013.

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