

NZSFC Summary

Review of Coromandel Scallop fishery

MPI are reviewing the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for the Coromandel Scallop fishery (SCACS). Two options are proposed. Option 1 is the status quo. Option 2 reduces the TACC by 50%, from 100 to 50 tonnes. The Initial Position Paper (IPP) was released on 14 January and **submissions are due by 11 February**. Any changes will apply from 1 April 2016.



This paper reviews the available information, highlights concerns and provides a recommendation that the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council submit a brief response to MPI.

Feedback

Please review this information and provide your earliest **feedback, by 9 February**, so it can be incorporated into a New Zealand Sport Fishing Council submission. Contact Trish Rea trish@moanaconsultants.co.nz or John Holdsworth john@bluewatermarine.co.nz.

Recommendations –

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council submit a brief response supporting the reduction in the TAC and TACC, also:

- Resubmit the information requests made in 2013, for the 2012 abundance survey information and the CPUE-limit rule scheme.
- Request information on port price and export returns for Coromandel scallops.
- Request an invitation to the March 2016 workshop to discuss both current assessment procedures and potential improvements.
- Resubmit objections to the ongoing use of Victorian box dredges due to their damaging effects on scallops, benthic communities, and habitats that sustain other species.
- While the Minister may have broad discretion in decision-making, he has a statutory duty to ensure sustainability. [Supreme Court, 2009]

Biology

Scallops mature at about 70mm shell length. They are very fertile and may spawn several times each year. Scallop populations can be highly variable from one year to the next. These variations often occur independent of fishing. The growth of scallops within the Coromandel fishery is variable among areas, years, seasons and depths. In the Hauraki Gulf scallops can grow to 100mm in 18 months or less, elsewhere this can take 3 or more years. In general, scallops in shallow water grow faster than those out deep. Growth rate is dependent, in part, on food supply. Average natural mortality in the Coromandel fishery is quite high. The maximum age for a scallop is thought to be about 6 or 7 years.

Management

The proposed options are as follows, with Option 1 being to keep the current limits:

Table 1: Proposed Management Settings for SCACS

Option	Total Allowable Catch (t)	Total Allowable Commercial Catch (t)	Allowances		
			Customary Māori (t)	Recreational	Other sources of fishing-related mortality
Option 1 (Status Quo)	131	100	10	10	11
Option 2	81	50	10	10	11

Seven commercial vessels operate in this fishery. The Minimum Legal Size (MLS) for commercially harvested scallops is 90mm and 100mm for recreationally caught scallops. The commercial season is 15 July to 21 December and the recreational season is 1 September to 31 March each year.

In 2013 the Minister for Primary Industries increased the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for Coromandel Scallops (SCACS) from 47 to 131 tonnes (t). The Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) was increased from 22 to 100 t meat weight. Commercial landings over the last 8 years have averaged 47 tonnes. Commercial landings in 2014/15 was 34 t.

Recreational and customary Maori allowances were increased from 7.5 to 10 t each. The National Panel Survey estimated around 8 t of recreational catch in 2011-12, although harvest can vary widely due to changing abundance and availability.

The TAC and TACC increases were based on the discovery of a new, significant bed of scallops in the Hauraki Gulf. This 2W bed was included in the last biomass survey, completed in 2012. Commercial fishers have not fished the 2W bed since 2013 and report it is no longer there.

MPI and industry have agreed to reduce the frequency of (annual) biomass surveys and management reviews in lieu of fine-scale analysis of commercial catch rates by area. A voluntary scheme, the “CPUE-limit rule” has been operating for the past 5 years. It requires daily reporting and harvesting to stop when an area is not producing specified catch rates. MPI note that CPUE is not a reliable index of abundance so the effectiveness of the CPUE-limit rule in ensuring the sustainability of the SCACS stock is uncertain.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) submitted against the 2013 TAC increase on the basis that we needed better understanding of the abundance and available biomass in the new, 2W Hauraki Gulf beds. The NZSFC also advocated that the annual abundance surveys ought to continue as they enable some level of stock monitoring in this highly variable fishery.

A workshop in March 2016 will consider how scallop fisheries are being assessed and may make recommendations for improvements to data collection, stock assessment modelling methods and

development of target and limit reference points. Actions arising from this review will be considered later in 2016 and may inform the future management of scallops.

MPI view

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) consider the risks associated with maintaining the current TAC, despite the likely change in fishery biomass, are partly mitigated by the voluntary and other measures applied in the commercial fishery. MPI consider the current catch limits may no longer be supported by current information. A biomass survey has not been undertaken since 2012 so is not available to inform this review. Section 13(2A) enables the TAC and TACC to be set in the absence of biomass information.

NZSFC preliminary view

The NZSFC objects to the ongoing use of the Victorian box dredge that plows the seabed to the cost of benthic life. The results are the continued destruction of once-healthy scallop beds. A more environmentally responsible and modern response is to insist that scallops are selected on the seafloor in such a manner that enables sub-legal fish to escape without injury.

NZSFC urge MPI to work with stakeholders to develop harvest strategies, including target and reference levels, and implement programs to effectively monitor then regulate commercial fishing effort in the Coromandel Scallop fishery.

Annual biomass surveys must be reinstated and the information made publicly available. Voluntary schemes may suit industry and MPI, but it does not allow for public scrutiny on how New Zealand's natural, marine resources are being exploited.

NZSFC concerns –

- MPI are withholding information requested since 2013. Requests were submitted for the 2012 abundance survey information and the CPUE-limit rule scheme.
- Current management is based on unvalidated, industry-only supplied data.
- Poor quality Initial Position Paper omits vital information, including a table of landings and details of s111 landings, where commercial fishers take scallops for recreational use.
- Sustainability cannot be ensured, as per statutory obligations, because there is no biomass estimate. The last biomass survey was conducted in 2012.
- Continued destruction of once-healthy scallop beds. The *State of the Gulf* report shows how scallop beds have become smaller over time.
- The loss of the highly abundant 2W Hauraki Gulf bed in two seasons, between 2011 and 2013, signals serious benthic damage. The current TACC was set on the assumption that this bed would be fished.
- Little consideration is given to importance of scallops in sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem function, and impacts on other species.
- Little regard is given to the concerns of the Hauraki Gulf community and the issues raised in previous, comprehensive NZSFC submissions since 2007. <http://goo.gl/X8iZpW>