



Marlborough Sounds blue cod regulatory review

Consultation Document

MPI Discussion Paper No: 2015/17

Prepared by the Blue Cod Management Group.

ISBN No: 978-0-908334-28-5 (print)
ISBN No: 978-0-908334-29-2 (online)
ISSN No: 2253-3893 (p)
ISSN No: 2253-3907 (o)

2 June 2015

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this document is accurate. MPI does not accept any responsibility or liability for any error of fact, omission, interpretation or opinion that may be present, however it may have occurred.

Requests for further copies should be directed to:

Publications Logistics Officer
Ministry for Primary Industries
PO Box 2526
WELLINGTON 6140

Email: brand@mpi.govt.nz

Telephone: 0800 00 83 33

Facsimile: 04-894 0300

This publication is available on the Ministry for Primary Industries website at:

<http://www.mpi.govt.nz/news-and-resources/consultations/>

© Crown Copyright - Ministry for Primary Industries

Contents		Page
1	Executive Summary	2
2	Current Situation	6
3	Pre-consultation	7
4	Proposed Options	8
4.1	Analysis of Options	8
4.2	Additional Actions	15
5	Marine Protected Areas Bill and Proposed Recreational Fishing Parks	16
6	Next Steps	16
7	Appendix 1: Blue Cod Fishery Characterisation	17

1 Executive Summary

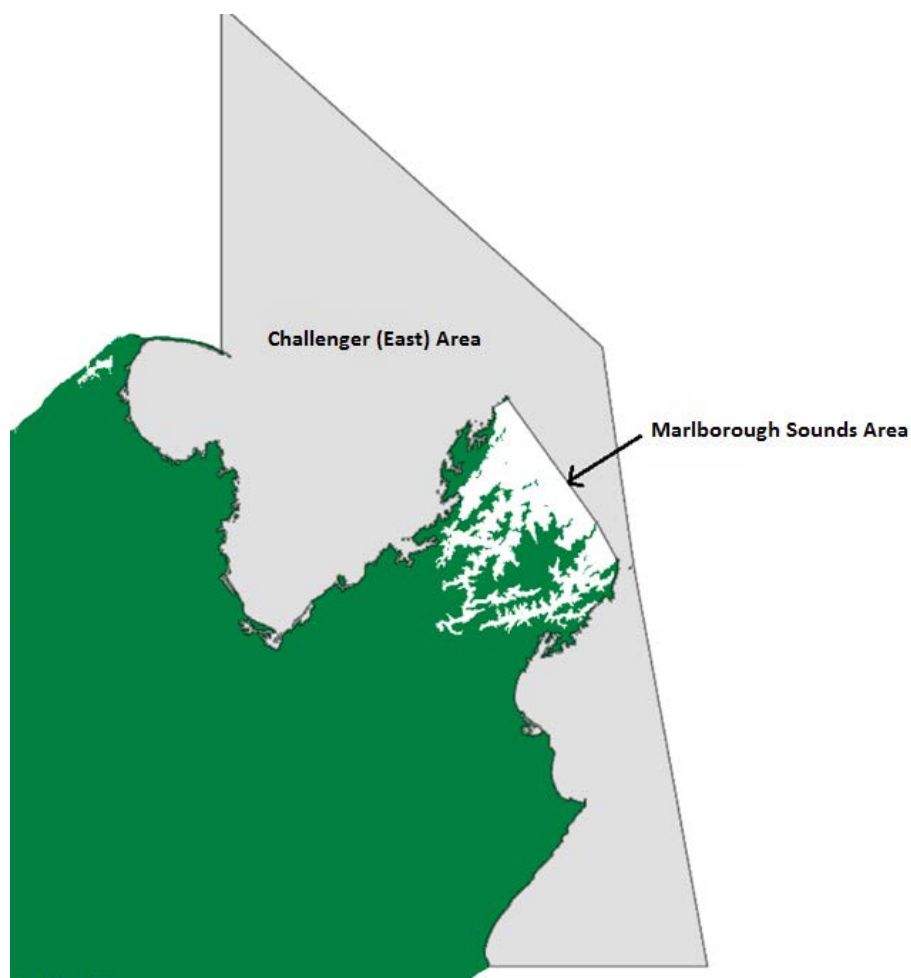


Figure 1: The Challenger (East) area (grey) and the Marlborough Sounds Area (MSA) (white).

The current recreational fishing rules for blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds Area (MSA) have been in place since 2011. The rules provided for reopening of the recreational fishery after it had been closed for three years (2008-2011) to allow blue cod numbers to recover.

A 2013 potting survey suggests that blue cod abundance has decreased in some areas of the MSA to similar levels as before the 2008 closure (refer to the fisheries characterisation in Appendix 1)¹. Additionally, it is clear from public feedback that some of the current rules are not supported; they are seen as overly complex and as having adverse unintended consequences on blue cod populations. These rules include the ‘slot’ rule and the ‘transit’ rule (Table 1). Given the importance of the fishery, it is opportune to review the current rules in light of the updated science information and public concern over the rules.

¹ Ministry for Primary Industries (2014). Fisheries Assessment Plenary, May 2014: stock assessments and stock status. Compiled by the Fisheries Science Group, Ministry for Primary Industries, Wellington, New Zealand. 1381 p.

The review of the rules has been undertaken by the Blue Cod Management Group (BCMG). The Group consists of recreational and commercial fishing interests and one member from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). The Group reports to the Minister for Primary Industries.

The BCMG has developed two options outlined in this paper. The options were informed by engagement with the local community, the general public, fisheries scientists, and representative fishing bodies. Each option proposes a new package of complementary management measures for consideration (see Table 1 below for full details). Written submissions are welcomed from tangata whenua, fishery stakeholders and other interested parties on each option package, including comments on the individual elements of each package.

Each option is designed to work as a complete package. The proposed rules reflect the popularity of the blue cod fishery in the MSA and Challenger (East) area and the vulnerability of the species to localised depletion. The rules are designed to promote sustainability of the fishery by providing for an enjoyable experience on the water, while encouraging fishers to only take enough fish for immediate consumption and leave the rest for another visit to the area. Restoring the blue cod fishery to a healthy state will require widespread support for the rules imposed and realistic expectations of what levels of harvest can be provided for in the immediate future.

The key aspects proposed under Option 1 are:

- Consistent recreational rules for the MSA and Challenger (East) area in terms of the minimum legal size, daily bag limit, and accumulation limit.
- Removal of the ‘slot’ rule and ‘transit’ rule.
- Amending the recreational seasonal closure (1 September to 19 December) to apply to the ‘inner’ Sounds only (same area as was closed in 2008, Figure 2), and introducing the same ‘inner’ Sounds closure for commercial fishers.
- Introducing a finfish no-take zone at Maud Island for commercial fishers.

The key aspects proposed under Option 2 that differ from Option 1 are:

- Different daily bag limits and accumulation limits between the MSA and Challenger (East) area.
- Retaining the recreational seasonal closure (1 September to 19 December) for the existing MSA and introducing the same closure for commercial fishers.
- Amending the filleting rule to allow recreational fishers to possess filleted blue cod but with fish frames retained for proof of length.

The BCMG’s preferred option is Option 1. The BCMG considers this option achieves simplicity and consistency in the recreational rules across the MSA and Challenger (East) area. Additionally, Option 1 retains relatively conservative elements that aim to rebuild blue cod in depleted areas and ensure the best outcomes for the fishery overall.

The BCMG recognises that both options will still require a need to closely monitor and manage the fishery in the future. There remains some risk of further depletion, and there is a need to invest in additional actions to supplement the regulatory packages proposed in this document. Additional actions will include:

- An improved management framework. This work, will include a full review of the current fishery monitoring program and consider new approaches to information collecting. The review will also look at fine-scale reporting and development of a more responsive framework for undertaking management actions.
- Habitat protection. This will include identification of key blue cod habitats and methods for protecting these habitats from fishing impacts, including the possible implementation of further area closures in the future.
- Increased education and communication campaign to promote stronger stewardship and fisher responsibility regarding the blue cod fishery.

These additional actions are discussed in section 4.2. As such, it should be accepted that any changes to regulations this year are only one step in a broader plan to address sustainability concerns for blue cod. Without consideration of these further actions, the proposals for regulation changes this year could have been much more conservative.

Table 1: Options for proposed regulatory changes to the blue cod fishing rules in the MSA and Challenger (East) area.

Management measures	Current settings – <i>Status quo</i>		Option 1 (BCMG preferred package) <i>consistent rules between areas</i>		Option 2 (alternative proposal) <i>rules are <u>not</u> consistent between areas</i>	
	MSA	Challenger (East)	MSA	Challenger (East)	MSA	Challenger (East)
Recreational size limits	‘Slot’ rule: Minimum legal size 30 cm Maximum legal size 35 cm	Minimum legal size 30 cm No maximum legal size	Minimum legal size 33 cm No maximum legal size		Minimum legal size 30 cm No maximum legal size	
Recreational daily bag limit /person/day	Daily bag limit of 2 blue cod	Daily bag limit of 3 blue cod	Daily bag limit of 2 blue cod		Daily bag limit of 2 blue cod	Daily bag limit of 3 blue cod
Recreational accumulation	Allow accumulation of 1 daily bag limit	Allow accumulation of 2 daily bag limits	Accumulation limit of 2 daily bag limits		Allow accumulation of 1 daily bag limit	Allow accumulation of 2 daily bag limits
Recreational ‘transit rule’	No transporting of blue cod through the MSA that do not meet the rules applied to the area		No transport restrictions		No transport restrictions	
Recreational filleting rule	Must possess blue cod in a whole or gutted state only, unless fish are for immediate personal consumption		Must possess blue cod in a whole or gutted state only, unless fish are for immediate personal consumption		Allow possession of filleted blue cod with frames kept for proof of length	
Seasonal closure	Seasonal closure for recreational blue cod fishing 1 Sep to 19 Dec No commercial closure	N/A	Introduce ‘Inner’ Sounds recreational & commercial seasonal closure 1 Sep to 19 Dec Fishing allowed in the ‘Outer’ Sounds year round	N/A	Recreational closure 1 Sep to 19 Dec in the MSA Introduce a seasonal closure for commercial fishers in the MSA (time period to be determined)	N/A
Maud Island no take zone	Recreational fishers must not take any finfish from the Maud Island closed area No commercial restriction	N/A	Recreational fishers must not take any finfish from the Maud Island closed area Introduce a finfish no-take zone for commercial fishers around Maud Island	N/A	Recreational fishers must not take any finfish from the Maud Island closed area Introduce a finfish no-take zone for commercial fishers around Maud Island	N/A
Recreational hook limit	Maximum of 2 hooks per line when fishing for any species	N/A	Maximum of 2 hooks per line when fishing for any species	N/A	Maximum of 2 hooks per line when fishing for any species	N/A

2 Current Situation

Blue cod are one of the most important recreational fishery species in New Zealand. Fishing for blue cod is an important activity in the MSA and Challenger (East) area for locals and holiday makers. There is a lot of recreational fishing effort in the area, which tends to be concentrated in Queen Charlotte and Pelorus Sounds, and around D'Urville Island. This effort is highest over the summer months when there is an influx of visitors, putting extra pressure on the blue cod fishery.

Blue cod are particularly vulnerable to fishing pressure because they:

- are localised (reports of blue cod migrating or moving long distances are rare);
- take bait easily;
- are relatively slow-growing and long-lived; and,
- have a unique life cycle in that females can change sex into males.

There have been concerns about the population of blue cod in and around the MSA since the early 1990s. A variety of different management regimes have been introduced to try and reduce serial depletion and population decline of blue cod (refer to the Fishery Characterisation in Appendix 1).

The current regulations that apply to recreational blue cod fishing in the MSA were implemented in 2011, after the recreational fishery had been closed in 2008 in the 'inner' Sounds to allow blue cod numbers to recover (Figure 2). There are different recreational rules for the MSA and the surrounding Challenger (East) area.

Available information suggests the current recreational fishing rules are not working to rebuild blue cod numbers in the MSA. There are also some concerns about the future of the blue cod fishery in the Challenger (East) area. A 2013 potting survey indicates that blue cod abundance in Queen Charlotte and Pelorus Sounds has decreased to similar levels as before the 2008 closure. While abundance has been more stable around D'Urville Island, scientific surveys indicate that fishing pressure has increased, and it is not clear if this level of effort is sustainable.

The BCMG was established in late-2008 to provide recreational community input to management of the fishery. The commercial sector and MPI were included as members of the BCMG in mid-2014. The BCMG has been tasked by the Minister for Primary Industries with reviewing the rules applying to the fishery. It is intended that any changes to the rules will be implemented by the end of this year.

For more information on blue cod refer to the Blue Cod Fishery Characterisation in Appendix 1. This document includes information on blue cod biology and research, profiles of the customary, recreational and commercial fisheries, fisheries compliance related information, and a discussion around what effects *other* impacts may be having on the abundance of blue cod (i.e. impacts other than targeted fishing pressure).

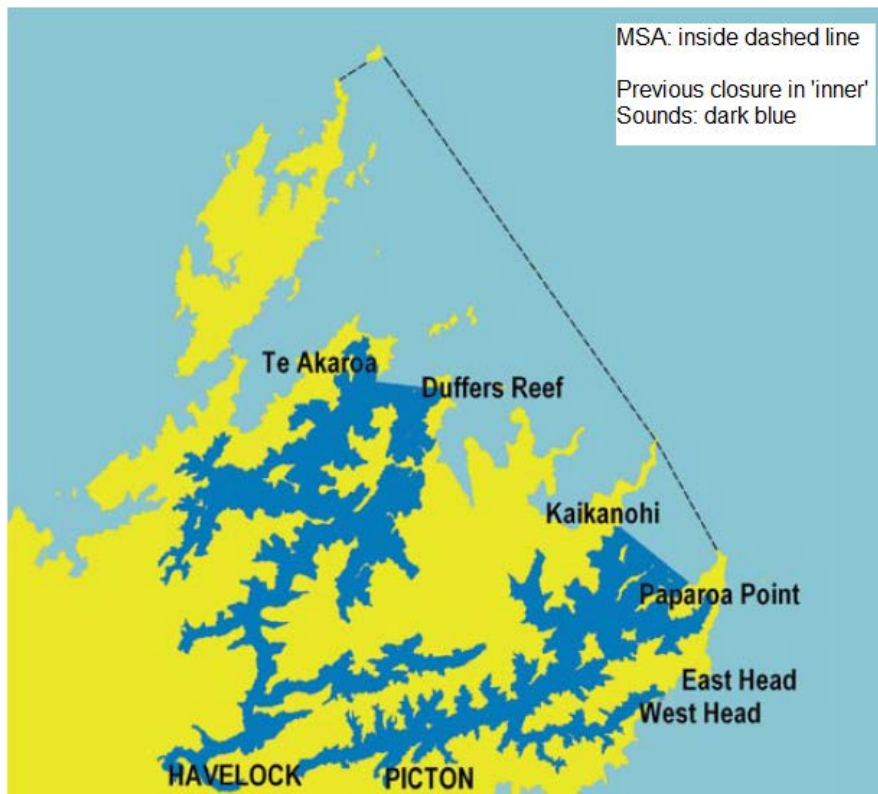


Figure 2: The Marlborough Sounds Area (MSA; within the dashed line) and the ‘inner’ Sounds (dark blue). The ‘inner’ Sounds were closed to recreational blue cod fishing between 2008 and 2011.

3 Pre-consultation

The BCMG undertook community engagement in March 2015 prior to the development of this Consultation Document, which included public drop-in information sessions that approximately 200 people attended in Nelson and Picton. Additionally, the Group set up an email address, MSbluecod@mpi.govt.nz, to receive further feedback and comments. Approximately 200 emails and letters have been received to date.

The key points raised during this community engagement phase were:

- Some of the current recreational rules are not supported because they are overly complex and do not appear to be working.
- The ‘slot’ rule in particular is not supported due to perceived high incidental mortality.
- Some recreational fishers perceive the current rules as inequitable between recreational and commercial fishers (i.e. the seasonal closure and Maud Island no-take zone).
- The ‘transit’ rule is confusing and makes it hard to comply with the other rules.
- A range of options for future management of the fishery were also presented by fishers during the meetings and subsequently via email. Most of these options have been incorporated by the BCMG into the proposals outlined below.

4 Proposed Options

The BCMG has developed two options for consideration, each containing a package of proposed rules that are complementary in nature and are intended to be most effective when implemented all together.

The proposals are presented here for the purpose of consultation with all sectors. Written submissions are welcomed from tangata whenua, fishery stakeholders and other interested parties on each option package. Views are also welcomed on any elements of each package, including whether or not they should be mixed and matched, or amended, and the rationale for doing so.

The proposed options are aimed at allowing everyone to enjoy access to a healthy blue cod fishery in the future. The proposals reflect the popularity of the blue cod fishery in the MSA and Challenger (East) area and vulnerability of the species to localised depletion.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1.1 *Status quo*

The BCMG does not support retention of the existing package of rules. Community engagement highlighted that there is very little support for some of the current rules, which has led to limited stewardship of the fishery. Furthermore, results from the 2013 potting survey indicate that the fishery has declined more strongly than expected in some parts of the MSA.

4.1.2 Option 1 – BCMG preferred option

Option 1 is the preferred option of the BCMG. Option 1 proposes a number of changes to current regulations (Table 2).

It is important that Option 1 is considered as a package, and that all measures under Option 1 are implemented together, as they support and rely on each other to achieve the overall goals for the fishery. In this package there is a trade-off between changes to the bag limit with the accumulation limit.

Table 2: Proposed changes to the rules for the blue cod fishery under **Option 1**. Rules are consistent across the MSA and Challenger (East) areas. For the *status quo*, see Table 1.

Management measures	Option 1 (BCMG preferred package) <i>consistent rules between areas</i>	
	Marlborough Sounds Area	Challenger (East) area
Recreational size limits	Remove the 'slot' rule Set minimum legal size of 33 cm	Increase minimum legal size from 30 to 33 cm.
Recreational daily bag limit per person per day	No change (daily bag limit of 2)	Reduce daily bag limit from 3 to 2 blue cod
Recreational accumulation limit	Increase accumulation limit from 1 to 2 daily bag limits	No change (accumulation limit of 2 daily bag limits)
Recreational 'transit rule'	Remove transit rule	
Recreational filleting rule	No change (must possess blue cod in a whole or gutted state only, unless fish are for immediate personal consumption)	
Seasonal closure	Introduce an 'inner' Sounds recreational and commercial seasonal closure from 1 September to 19 December Fishing allowed in the 'outer' Sounds year round	N/A
Maud Island no take zone	No change for recreational Introduce a finfish no-take zone for commercial fishers around Maud Island	N/A
Recreational hook limit	No change	N/A

Specific Limits

Option 1 proposes to:

- remove the maximum legal size (and therefore the 'slot' rule);
- set a consistent minimum legal size, daily bag limit, and accumulation limit across the MSA and Challenger (East) area; and
- remove the 'transit' rule.

The proposed changes reflect initial community feedback that there is strong support for simplicity and consistency. The proposed package will be easier to comply with and easier to enforce.

The BCMG considers it necessary that a conservative bag limit and minimum legal size are set to reflect the current state of the fishery and safeguard this resource for the future.

The 2013 potting survey indicates that the fishery became rapidly depleted in some locations when the fishery reopened in 2011 (refer to the fisheries characterisation in Appendix 1). There are also conflicting anecdotal reports from fishers. Some reports corroborate the downward catch trends highlighted by the potting survey, others suggest that the fishery is in good health.

This blue cod fishery is iconic and very important to many New Zealanders. The BCMG wants to ensure that people can keep using the resource, and consider that relatively conservative rules are necessary. This approach is supported by the science and many anecdotal reports that highlight sustainability concerns for the fishery. To achieve a simple rule framework, this means setting a bag limit of 2 and a minimum legal size of 33 cm across the MSA and Challenger (East) area.

Some people have promoted increasing the bag limit from 2 to 3 for the MSA as an alternative way of creating consistency between the MSA and Challenger (East) area. The BCMG notes that there is no information to support an increase in the bag limit at this time in the MSA. If the fishery recovers, then the rules to provide for greater take may be reviewed in the future. The bag and size limits proposed under Option 1 mitigate the risk that if the limits are set too generously now, any further depletion may lead to stricter constraints in the future.

The BCMG recognises that 33 cm may be considered too high a minimum legal size for some locations in the MSA. The BCMG acknowledges that setting this minimum legal size may result in a high number of fish returned to the water to take a full bag limit in these locations. The 33 cm size, as proposed under Option 1, is expected to encourage fishers to target areas where larger fish are likely to be available, which will be easier than it is currently due to the transit rule being removed. Additionally, providing the incentive for fishers to target larger fish under the proposed minimum legal size of 33 cm is intended to reduce incentives to high grade if the minimum legal size were set lower. The BCMG considers that a minimum legal size of 33 cm gives the best chance for the fishery to recover.

Given the consistency in rules proposed under Option 1 for the MSA and Challenger (East) area, the transit rule would be removed as it will not be necessary to aid enforcement of different rules for different areas. As a result, this will allow fishers based in the MSA to fish outside the MSA where productivity and abundance of blue cod may be higher, and they will be able to bring their catch home into the MSA. The proposed change removes an unintended negative impact of the current rules, which is the concentration of fishing effort in the MSA.

Currently, no accumulation is allowed in the MSA, and fishers may only be in possession of 1 daily bag limit. Option 1 proposes an increase to allow accumulation of 2 daily bag limits. The BCMG considers the change is important for achieving consistency in rules between the MSA and Challenger (East) area, but recognises that this may send the wrong message to some fishers. It is important that fishers have an enjoyable experience out on the water, but without the expectation of filling their freezer. The BCMG aims to reinforce this expectation through education. Setting a limit on how much can be accumulated promotes the understanding that the resource is very limited in parts of the MSA and Challenger (East) area, and therefore only what you will use that day should be taken, and the rest left for another visit to the area.

Under Option 1, no changes are proposed to the no filleting rule and hook limit. The no filleting rule would be retained and fishers would continue to be required to retain blue cod in a measurable state, unless for immediate consumption. It is important that the minimum legal size is strictly followed in this fishery, and that fishers take care to target fish over the minimum legal size. Having a rule that requires fishers to retain fish in a measurable state makes it possible for Fishery Officers to effectively enforce this rule. It also provides fishers with stronger incentive to be careful about targeting and only taking fish that are above this minimum legal size. The BCMG considers it important to retain the hook limit to minimise bycatch and incidental mortality of blue cod.

Fishing Closures

Option 1 proposes to introduce the existing recreational no-take finfish zone around Maud Island for commercial fishers. The BCMG welcomes feedback from the commercial sector and other stakeholders on this proposal, and whether the closure should be managed as either a voluntary measure or by regulation.

Option 1 also proposes to reduce the spatial area of the seasonal closure and apply the closure to both recreational and commercial fishers. It is proposed that the seasonal closure would apply to the ‘inner’ Sounds (Figure 2) rather than the MSA, and the same closure dates would apply to both sectors (1 September – 19 December).

Creating a seasonal closure for commercial fishers will help ensure the blue cod populations in the ‘inner’ Sounds are given a break from blue cod fishing pressure from all sectors. It is acknowledged that minimal commercial blue cod catch comes from the ‘inner’ Sounds because most commercial blue cod fishers do not fish the inner areas.

The BCMG supports a recreational seasonal closure in the ‘inner’ Sounds as a means of reducing catch in this fishery. The latest potting survey results indicate that the ‘inner’ Sounds are more depleted than the ‘outer’ Sounds. Therefore, the BCMG considers it important to continue the recreational seasonal closure to facilitate population recovery. If future monitoring indicates blue cod abundance is continuing to decline, then further measures may need to be considered such as extending the dates of the closed season. Retaining the closure in the ‘inner’ Sounds is also an important incentive for fishers to target the ‘outer’ Sounds where productivity appears to be higher.

Overall Assessment

In summary, the greatest benefits of Option 1 are that it creates simple, understandable, equitable rules that are consistent across the MSA and Challenger (East) area, and as a result are likely to have a high level of public buy-in. The rules are designed to restrict catch, reduce handling mortality, and minimise high-grading. Through reducing the biological impacts and achieving greater buy-in and compliance, Option 1 will hopefully lead to better outcomes for the fishery.

The largest perceived downside to Option 1 may be that it restricts recreational take in the Challenger (East) area relative to the *status quo*. The BCMG considers this impact is outweighed by the benefit of having consistent rules across the MSA and Challenger (East) area. Furthermore, given evidence that recreational effort is increasing in west D’Urville, the BCMG considers it important to take a precautionary approach to managing this fishery, so as to prevent closures or overly strict rules in the future, as has been the lesson in the MSA.

4.1.3 Option 2

Similarly to Option 1, Option 2 presents a package of proposed measures for the fishery (Table 3). The rules have been put together in this package because they are expected to support and rely on each other, and function as a unit to achieve the goals set for this fishery.

Option 2 is not preferred by the BCMG. The rules are not as simple or consistent across the MSA and Challenger (East) area, and are not expected to achieve as positive an outcome for the fishery and fishers as Option 1.

Table 3: Proposed changes to the rules for the blue cod fishery under **Option 2**. Rules will not be consistent across the MSA and Challenger (East) area. For the *status quo*, see Table 1.

Management measures	Option 2	
	Marlborough Sounds Area	Challenger (East) area
Recreational size limits	Remove the 'slot rule' Set minimum legal size of 30 cm	No change (minimum legal size of 30 cm)
Recreational daily bag limit per person per day	Daily bag limit of 2	No change Daily bag limit of 3
Recreational accumulation limit	Allow accumulation of 1 daily bag limit	No change Allow accumulation of 2 daily bag limits
Recreational 'transit rule'	Remove transit rule	
Recreational filleting rule	Allow possession of filleted blue cod with frames kept for proof of length	
Seasonal closure	No change for recreational Introduce a seasonal closure for commercial fishers in the MSA (time period to be determined)	N/A
Maud Island no take zone	No change for recreational Introduce a finfish no-take zone for commercial fishers around Maud Island	N/A
Recreational hook limit	No change	N/A

Specific Limits

Option 2 proposes to:

- remove the maximum legal size (and therefore the ‘slot’ rule);
- set a minimum legal size of 30 cm for the MSA (which will match the current minimum legal size for the Challenger (East) area);
- retain the daily bag limits of 2 for the MSA and 3 in the Challenger (East) area;
- retain a no-accumulation limit for the MSA and the accumulation of 2 daily bag limits in the Challenger (East) area; and
- remove the transit rule, despite the inconsistency in rules.

Option 2 takes into account that blue cod are of a relatively small size in some parts of the MSA, and it may be difficult for fishers to take fish over 30 cm in these locations. As a result, it is more generous than Option 1 in allowing for a smaller minimum legal size of 30 cm.

Additionally, Option 2 takes into account that some measures in Option 1 may be seen as too conservative for the Challenger (East) area, and therefore retains the *status quo* bag limit of 3 and minimum legal size of 30 cm. However, the BCMG does not consider that the MSA can sustain a bag limit higher than 2 at this time as the fishery still needs to recover in many locations. Also, given the lower minimum legal size of 30 cm proposed for the MSA under Option 2, the BCMG considers it necessary to retain a no-accumulation limit in the MSA, to reduce effort and provide an additional safeguard for this fishery.

Despite the inconsistency in the rules between the MSA and Challenger (East) area under Option 2, the BCMG considers it important to remove the transit rule. The transit rule helps Fishery Officers to effectively enforce the rules for the MSA, but it has the unintended and negative consequence of concentrating fishing effort in the MSA, which is also currently the most depleted and vulnerable to overfishing. Therefore, Option 2 proposes to remove the transit rule so that fishers are incentivised to fish outside the MSA as they will be able to bring their catch home through the area.

Removing the transit rule relies on the honesty and integrity of fishers to take care of their own resource in the MSA, and abide by the new rules so that they may safeguard their resource for future generations.

Option 2 proposes a new filleting rule. Fishers would be able to fillet fish at sea, but they must retain the frames for proof of length. Similarly to Option 1, the BCMG considers that given the vulnerability of the blue cod fishery relative to other fisheries in the MSA and Challenger (East) area, it is especially important that fishers abide by the minimum legal sizes set for this fishery, and do all in their capability to target blue cod above the minimum legal size. Allowing filleting with retention of the frames provides an additional possibility for Fishery Officers to enforce the minimum legal size, but risks remain that this may not be as effective as requiring fishers to retain whole fish.

As under Option 1, Option 2 also proposes no changes to the hook limit.

Fishery Closures

Option 2 proposes the same rules for Maud Island as Option 1. This is to retain the recreational no-take finfish zone around Maud Island, and to introduce a no-take finfish zone for commercial. Feedback is welcomed from the commercial sector and other stakeholders on this proposal, and whether the closure should be either managed as a voluntary measure or by regulation.

Option 2 proposes no change to the current recreational seasonal closure for blue cod in the MSA. The closure would continue to apply from 1 September to 19 December and would apply to the current boundary of the MSA (as opposed to the smaller 'inner' Sounds area proposed under Option 1). Under Option 2, the same closure is proposed to be applied to commercial fishers.

Information indicates that commercial blue cod take in the MSA comes from outer areas, which are proposed to be closed under Option 2. As a result, restricting commercial take to the same seasonal closure as recreational may mean that commercial fishing effort is concentrated in the summer months, when the highest number of recreational fishers are also fishing. This could lead to increased competition between recreational and commercial users and little benefit to the resource. Commercial take is constrained through the annual setting of a Total Allowable Commercial Catch, which limits overall commercial fishing effort for blue cod.

To avoid increased competition for space between sectors, the BCMG has discussed the possibility of setting different seasonal closure dates for recreational and commercial fishers. Feedback is welcomed from stakeholders and the public on different timing for the closed seasons within the MSA for different sectors.

Overall Assessment

Option 2 recognises that there are some differences between the MSA and Challenger (East) area with respect to abundance and size of blue cod. Consequently, Option 2 proposes inconsistent and relatively complicated rules across the top of the South Island, due to the fact that the MSA is not able to sustain a higher daily bag limit at this time, or higher accumulation limit, given the lower proposed minimum legal size of 30 cm.

Option 2 retains the current boundary (MSA) and time period for the recreational seasonal closure, and proposes applying this same closure for commercial fishers. Under Option 2, setting different time periods for the recreational seasonal closure and proposed commercial seasonal closure could be considered, so as to stagger effort and reduce competition for space within the MSA.

Overall, the BCMG prefers Option 1. However, given that it is not immediately apparent that the Challenger (East) area needs effort reductions at this time, the BCMG would accept Option 2 if there is no, or limited, public support and acceptance of the simple and consistent rules proposed under Option 1.

4.2 ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

Regardless of which option is supported, the BCMG considers that further action is required to support any new regulations and ensure the ongoing sustainable utilisation of the fishery. As outlined in the Executive Summary, the options proposed retain some risk to the blue cod fishery. Complementary measures that are proposed in addition to Options 1 and 2 are outlined below. Work on these additional actions will commence this year. Public feedback is welcomed on the following proposals.

Future Management Framework

The BCMG considers it imperative that a commitment is made to developing a more responsive and effective management framework for blue cod. As part of this framework development, the BCMG suggests investigating fine-scale reporting for commercial fishers, development of an information strategy, and improvements to how management decisions are made in the future.

Fine-scale reporting for commercial fishers would involve splitting the current statistical reporting area 017 into sub-areas for commercial reporting purposes only. This would provide finer resolution on where commercial blue cod take is coming from around the MSA and Challenger (East) area, and more accurate information for considering changes to regulations in the future. Charter vessels currently report blue cod catches by latitude and longitude.

Development of an information strategy would involve a complete review of the current monitoring program and potting surveys. It would assess what additional scientific surveys could be undertaken, how other sources of information that do not necessarily follow scientific methodology such as anecdotal information can be taken into account, and finally, how success of the new proposed regulations could be monitored.

Improvements to how management decisions are made would take a broad look at the framework for managing blue cod and making management decisions. The BCMG considers that the framework needs to be more efficient and responsive, so that new information can be integrated and formulated into management actions quickly when it is determined necessary.

Small Area Closures

The BCMG considers that blue cod would benefit from measures that protect them from more than just targeted fishing pressure. Specifically, MPI is committed to undertaking the necessary research to identify areas of important habitats for blue cod, and investigating ways of protecting these areas in the future. This analysis may lead to area closures where some or all fishing methods are prohibited, to protect important habitats of significance to fisheries and ecosystem management, and to promote the productivity of blue cod.

Education Campaign

Regardless of the measures adopted, the BCMG considers that the blue cod population will always be sensitive to localised depletion due to the sheer number of fishers involved in the fishery, and the aspects of blue cod biology and ecology that make them vulnerable to overfishing. As a result, fisher responsibility and stewardship is a large component of what will make changes to the regulations a success.

The BCMG proposes that an educational campaign is implemented later in 2015 to help the public understand and accept the message of responsibility, and either start or continue to reflect this in their fishing habits. It is important that everyone in the community and visitors alike take responsibility for the blue cod fishery by setting themselves reasonable expectations and then fishing based on those expectations. It is unlikely that the fishery resource will get to a stage where it is able to sustain all fishers taking home a feed for the freezer.

Additionally, minimising incidental mortality of blue cod is important for ensuring that there are more fish in the water next time you go fishing. The BCMG proposes to use the educational campaign to promote greater awareness of best fishing practices. This will include how to fish for only what you need, how to target fish of the right size and species, and safe handling and release in the event that targeting fails and a smaller fish, (or fish of the wrong species) is caught.

5 Marine Protected Areas Bill and proposed recreational fishing parks

The BCMG and MPI initiated a review of the blue cod rules in 2013, in response to stakeholder concerns and the best available information. The review was initiated prior to, and is independent from the announcements surrounding a potential recreational fishing park in the Marlborough Sounds.

A discussion paper on a new Marine Protected Areas Bill will be out for public consultation later this year. This will outline legislative proposals establishing new types of marine protection including recreational fishing parks. When this policy is finalised, there will then be further discussion and consultation on such a park in the Marlborough Sounds.

The issues around blue cod management should not be delayed because of this future proposed park. The review predates this proposal and needs to be concluded. Any changes in the recreational rules for blue cod this year will apply in any future park.

6 Next Steps

Following consultation, the BCMG will draft a Decision Document (final advice) to the Minister for Primary Industries, who will make a decision on the rules for the fishery. Work on additional actions will commence this year.

The timeline for the Decision Document and implementation is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Timeline for implementation of any changes to blue cod regulations

Action	Dates
Decision Document to the Minister for Primary Industries	Early August
Cabinet regulatory review processes	August - September
Minister's decisions on the regulations are announced	October
Implementation of new regulations	By 20 December 2015 (before the recreational fishery re-opens)

Appendix 1: Blue Cod Fishery Characterisation