

**Paua battle almost over - last Wednesday, the Ministry for Primary Industries convened a meeting of over 15 key stakeholder representatives at Otakou Marae, Dunedin in an attempt to resolve the long-running battle over a proposal to open up closed populations of paua to commercial fishing.**

Nine months after passionate New Zealanders first mobilised in their fight to protect one of the treasures of New Zealand's south, the battle is finally drawing to a close.

This was the last of 3 meetings convened by MPI to uncover and report on further evidence and seek agreement from all parties about paua and paua diving in these four closed areas.

Kees Meeuws, former All Black and Paua to the People spokesman, says, "The commercial guys have acknowledged they didn't do their homework, and that they underestimated the use and value of these areas."

All stakeholders, including Paua Industry representatives, have unanimously accepted that in the four closed areas there is a greater relative abundance of paua than in open areas, that non-commercial harvest is easier in these areas, that significant non-commercial use takes place in all four areas, and that these paua populations are of immense significance and value to non-commercial users.

"Given the huge weight of over 2,700 submissions, and the mountain of evidence regarding the value and significance of these areas to non-commercial paua fishers, anything other than keeping these areas closed would make a mockery of the consultation process. We would be very surprised if the Ministry was to do anything other than recommend that these areas remain closed to commercial paua fishing," says Hamish Forrester, ex-commercial Paua diver and Paua to the People spokesman.

Mr. Forrester goes on to say that "MPI have promised a 'no surprises' process, and MPI have indicated that their final report should reach the Minister before Christmas."

Paua to the People are confident Minister Guy will draw the obvious conclusion that these areas should remain closed to commercial fishing, yet the campaign will continue until the status quo is guaranteed.

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**Timeline/ background:**

Currently, commercial paua harvesting is prohibited from some sections of the Otago and Southland coastlines. In March 2013, a paua industry plan to allow commercial paua harvesting from areas from which it is currently prohibited was put out to consultation. The proposal asked if opening these areas would have a significant negative impact on non-commercial paua fishers.

Advice from MPI at the time indicated that all that was needed to ensure their continued protection from commercial fishing was proof that the paua populations in these areas are indeed used by, and of value to, non-commercial users. This proof has been provided in spades.

Over two and a half thousand submissions were received in response to this proposal – over 99% of which supported the status quo = retention of existing regulations to exclude commercial paua harvest from these subsections of the Otago and Southland

In MPI's final advice to the Minister (May 2013) they stated that: “The objective of consultation was to identify areas that could be re-opened without negatively impacting on non-commercial paua fishers. The consultation process has not been successful in terms of this objective.”

MPI recommended to Minister Guy that he defer his decision until stakeholders have an opportunity to present an agreed plan to him later this year. The MPI also offered the option to “retain the status quo given consultation suggest all proposed area are highly utilised by non-commercial fishers” (sic)

In June, Nathan Guy decided that 'fishery participants (customary, recreational, and commercial) should be given a further opportunity to engage and reach an agreement on any changes to the commercial access restrictions that apply in the PAU 5D fishery' and noted that 'the closed areas confer benefits to non-commercial benefits'. He directed MPI officials to organise cross sector engagement before providing final recommendations in a few months time.

A series of stakeholders meetings has now been completed.

Over the last few months, commercial paua industry representatives have joined forces with all other stakeholders in acknowledging that these areas are used and

highly valued by non-commercial stakeholders. In addition to the thousands of submissions providing often highly detailed descriptions of non-commercial use in these areas, we now have data from MPI themselves detailing fisheries interactions that confirm recreational use of these areas. In addition to this, information pertaining to customary permits clearly stating that the vast majority of paua taken under a permit are taken from these closed areas has also been circulated among stakeholders participating in this process.