

Mark Connor
President
NZ Sport Fishing Council
PO Box 93
Whangarei
secretary@nzsportfishing.org.nz



Inshore Fisheries Management
Ministry for Primary Industries
PO Box 2526
Wellington 6140
FMSubmission@mpi.govt.nz

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NZ Sport Fishing Council submission on the review of sustainability and other management controls for Snapper 7 (SNA7)

NZ Sport Fishing Council

1. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) appreciates the opportunity to submit feedback on the review sustainability and other management controls for Snapper 7 (SNA 7). The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) released their proposals on 12 July 2013, with submissions due by 9 August. The NZSFC requested an extension to the submission deadline for Sea perch 1, Kingfish 7 and Snapper 7, on 7 August. MPI declined this request on 7 August.
2. NZSFC representatives are available to discuss this submission in more detail if required. We look forward to positive outcomes from this review and would like to be kept informed of future developments. Our contact is Roz Nelson, secretary@nzsportfishing.org.nz.
3. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council is a National Sports Organisation with over 32,000 affiliated members from 54 clubs nationwide. Snapper is an iconic species recreationally and a taonga [treasure] for tangata whenua.
4. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council supports the FMA 7 Recreational Fishers' Forum in objecting to a TACC increase, due to their concerns that any TACC increase will slow the rebuild of this important fishery.
5. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council supports the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association in advocating for an increase in the recreational daily bag limit, from 3 to 6, applying in the Marlborough Sounds.

Recommendations

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council recommends the Minister for Primary Industries (MPI) manages the Snapper 7 (SNA 7) to the following levels:

- Increase the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) from 306 to 356 tonnes (t)
- Retain the existing Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) at 200 tonnes t
- Retain the existing allowance for customary Maori interests at 16 t
- Make a new allowance for fishing related mortality of 20 t
- Increase the recreational allowance from 90 to 120 t, and increase the daily bag limit in the Marlborough Sounds from 3 to 6 per person.

The NZSFC also recommends that MPI implement on-board electronic monitoring of trawl operations in this mixed trawl fishery.

Purpose & principles of the Act

6. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council is committed to ensuring that sustainability measures and management controls in SNA 7 are designed and implemented to achieve the purpose and principles of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act).
7. Pursuant to sections 9 and 10 of the Fisheries Act, a precautionary approach needs to be taken in this highly valued fishery, which is managed using uncertain and incomplete information, and because a healthy snapper fishery contributes to a thriving coastal ecosystem.
8. The snapper fishery must be sufficiently abundant to enable us, the public, and Maori customary fishers to provide for our social, economic and cultural wellbeing, pursuant to section 8(2)(b) of the Fisheries Act.
9. The SNA 7 fishery must be maintained to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations, pursuant to s8(2)(a) of the Fisheries Act.

Snapper 7 management

10. The SNA 7 stock management target is the default Harvest Strategy Standard of 40% of unfished biomass (B₀). The soft limit is 20% B₀ and the hard limit is 10%. It is unknown where the stock is in relation to the target biomass or these limits.
11. The SNA 7 stock and catch limits have not been reviewed since 1997. This review will be the first time an allowance will be made for fishing related mortality.
12. The minimum legal size (MLS) for recreationally caught snapper is 25cm. A daily bag limit of 10 per person applies, except in the Marlborough Sounds, where the daily limit is 3 per person.

SNA 7 fishery

13. MPI note the best information available is insufficient to enable reliable estimates of B_{current} and B_{msy}.
14. MPI note that two years ago the West Coast South Island trawl survey detected a pulse in recruitment of SNA 7 and flagged that Catch Per Unit of Effort (CPUE) was likely to increase in following years. CPUE has increased and MPI take that as indication that abundance has also increased. However, MPI note the CPUE index is *“likely to be over-optimistic”* and that the CPUE index is *“likely to exaggerate the scale of the increase in stock biomass”*. We would add that it is totally implausible that a stock like snapper would have a fourfold increase in just two years. Therefore the CPUE index is not tracking abundance alone.
15. The NZSFC tends to agree with advice given to the Snapper Working Group, that there was *“most likely a recent increase in stock abundance although recruitment to [the] fishery may have coincided with increased catchability of snapper due to environmental conditions”*. A similar phenomenon happened with recreational catch in the inner Hauraki Gulf in 2011-12.
16. Many years of intense commercial fishing by domestic and Japanese trawlers depleted the once-large SNA 7 fishery. There are eight years of historic catch where landings exceeded 1,000 tonnes and in 1978 reported catch was 2,720 t. Given this level of exploitation it is no surprise that the fishery ended up in a collapsed state by 1990.
17. In the Initial Position Paper (IPP) the Ministry note that in 1990 the TACC was reduced from 374 tonnes to 160.3t.
18. Omitted from the IPP is an explanation that at the outset of the quota management system (QMS), in 1986, the TACC was set at 330 tonnes, it increased to 363t the following year and increased again to 372t. Due to the lack of information in the IPP we can only guess that these increases were due to appeals to the Quota Appeal Authority.

19. Clearly these historic catch levels were unsustainable and a more precautionary approach is required when managing this important fishery, especially given the unknown impact of the current young age structure of the SNA 7 population.

Management proposals

Table 1: Current and proposed Total Allowable Catch (TAC), allowances for non-commercial interests and fishing related mortality, and the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for SNA 7, in tonnes (t).

| Option | TAC (t) | Customary allowance (t) | Recreational allowance (t) | Other mortality (t) | TACC (t) |
|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| MPI Option 1 status quo | 306 | 16 | 90 | 0 | 200 |
| MPI Option 2* | 357 | 16 | 99 | 22 | 220 |
| NZSFC | 356 | 16 | 120 | 20 | 200 |

* Includes an increased recreational DBL from 3 to 5 in the Marlborough Sounds.

20. Given current information the SNA 7 fishery is assumed to be rebuilding from past collapsed levels. There is more risk associated with implementing option 2, than option 1. MPI consider the risk is acceptable, as the stock will still move towards Bmsy, but at a slower rate.

Option 1

21. MPI's Option 1 is not a viable or lawful option given the Minister's obligation to set aside an allowance for fishing related mortality. In this bulk harvest fishery historic mortality levels are assumed to be high, and when added to past catch levels the major cause of the collapse of SNA 7.
22. MPI note that \$109,808 in deemed values was paid for over-catch in the 2011/12 year. The NZSFC has addressed the issue of deemed values many times and continues to advocate the reduction of next year's catch levels in line with the current year's overcatch. Monetary, deemed value penalties are not a disincentive to catch and kill fish, they are merely an incentive to not land the fish.

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

23. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council recommends the Minister sets a new TAC of 356 tonnes to accommodate an increase in the recreational allowance and to make a new allowance for fishing related mortality.
24. Without explicit reference or preference to proportional allocation, the proposed increase is 10% to both the TACC and recreational allowance. The NZSFC opposes any notion of proportional allocation in our fisheries.
25. Our fisheries are public resources that the Minister is obliged to manage sustainably to provide for future generations' needs, pursuant to s8(2)(a) of the Act.
26. While managing for future needs, the Minister is obliged to allow for our current non-commercial fishing and environmental interests and set or vary the TACC under s21 of the Act. Commercial quota holders have a proportion or share of the available TACC, which can be set at zero. Commercial shareholders do not have a proportion of the TAC.
27. The public's interests on the other hand are managed outside of the quota system, we do not have an allocation and the Minister sets aside a tonnage to cover the mortality associated with public fishing.

Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC)

28. The commercial stakeholder organisation, the Southern Inshore Fisheries Management Company (SIFMC) has requested a TACC increase for SNA 7 due to the perceived increase in abundance. The current 200 t TACC has been over-caught for the past two years (by 4% and 8%).
29. Most of the catch is being taken from Tasman Bay/Golden Bay during October to April. An increasing proportion of the catch is being taken earlier in the fishing year.

30. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council strongly objects to any TACC increase based on overcatch of existing levels. The very purpose of the TACC is to constrain commercial catch!
31. Commercial fishers complain that they are finding it difficult to avoid snapper bycatch when targeting flatfish, red cod, school shark, baracoutta, jack mackerel, gurnard and tarakihi.
32. Commercial fishers report that 48% of snapper caught is targeted by bottom trawl and bottom pair trawl. Around 52% is “bycatch” of other species. 90% of the “bycatch” is from bottom trawls, with small amounts from Danish seining, mid-water trawl and set nets.
33. It is clear that the continued use of bulk harvesting methods does nothing to improve selectivity of species. Now is the time for managers and users of these bulk harvesting methods to develop smarter fishing practices.
34. It is not reasonable for commercial operators to pass the cost of bulk harvesting onto the fishery, the ecosystem that supports our fisheries, and other user groups. There is smarter technology available and it ought to be implemented.
35. Moreover, the NZSFC does not accept a TACC increase based on this “bycatch” issue. It is not “bycatch”, it may be classed as unintended, discarded or unmanaged catch, but these operators know the waters they fish and they generally know when and where they catch different species throughout the year, so to suggest this is “bycatch” and they need an increased TACC to cover it is not reasonable. What they seem to need is a better catch portfolio to cover what they are likely to catch in Area 7.
36. The Minister cannot reasonably manage the 200 t SNA 7 fishery in isolation to these other species with TACCs that do not constrain catch. For example, the TACC for flatfish is 2066 t, ten times the snapper TACC, and from 2000 to 2011/12 the amount of flatfish caught ranges from 21% to 68% of the TACC. The Red cod (RCO7) TACC is 3126t, and from 2000 to 2011/12 catch varied from 45% to 109%. So not only is the RCO7 TACC 15 times larger than the SNA 7 quota, it does not constrain commercial effort anyway.
37. Using “bycatch” as the basis for a Ministerial decision to increase the SNA 7 TACC does not meet the requirements of best available information and cannot be considered reasonable.

Customary Maori interests

38. Snapper (tāmure) is a taonga species for tangata whenua and is included in the Te Waipounamu Iwi Fisheries Plan.
39. As with most fisheries, the information held by MPI on Maori customary catch in SNA 7 is uncertain.
40. The Minister is obligated to set aside a tonnage to allow for Maori customary interests. MPI propose to retain the existing allowance of 16 tonne. The NZSFC supports retaining this allowance.

Other mortality

41. MPI cannot precisely quantify the amount of mortality caused by fishing. MPI note that potential sources of mortality include high grading in response to market preference for larger fish, discarding to avoid deemed value fines and incidental mortality caused by bulk harvesting methods, trawling, Danish seining and set netting.
42. The NZSFC find it remarkable that a fishery that has been so intensely targeted has not previously had an allowance made to cover fishing related mortality.
43. Given the dynamics in this mixed trawl fishery the NZSFC recommends MPI implements on-board electronic monitoring of trawl operations.

44. The NZSFC recommends an allowance of 20 t to cover fishing related mortality, within a TAC of 356 t. There is no increased sustainability risk with this increase because it is mortality that is already occurring every year in this fishery.
45. Alternatively, the Minister may choose to allow 20 t for other mortality within a TAC of 336 t, and set the TACC lower, at 180 t, in recognition that the mortality is being caused by commercial fishing and to incentivise development of improved harvesting methods.

Recreational interests

46. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council recommends the Minister sets a TAC of 356 tonnes and makes a technical adjustment to the recreational allowance from 90 to 120 tonnes based on increases the individual daily bag limit (DBL) from 3 to 6 in the Marlborough Sounds.
47. NZSFC note and accept that MPI will not be able to implement any changes in regulations applying to recreational fishers until 2014.
48. Since 1985 recreational interests in the Marlborough Sounds have suffered a 90% reduction in their access to the snapper fishery. Their daily bag limit has been reduced from 30 in 1985 to the current 3 per person. The Minimum Legal Size (MLS) for snapper is 25cm.
49. Recreational interests have contributed the most to rebuilding SNA 7 yet they were not the ones responsible for its collapse. It is only fair and reasonable that individual fishers are given greater access to this fishery as it now rebuilds.
50. The Minister must also recognise that the regulations limiting recreational access to Blue Cod in the Marlborough Sounds has had a detrimental affect on people's social, economic and cultural wellbeings. A small increase in access to snapper may mitigate some of the effects suffered by private interests and fishing related businesses and tourist operations.
51. NZSFC recommend that the recreational allowance increase from 90 to 120 t based on the number of snapper that may be taken with the revised bag limit in the popular Marlborough Sounds fishery. The estimated mean weight of recreationally caught snapper in SNA 7 is 800g. At this mean weight 90 t equals 112,500 fish. At 120 t this equals 150,000 fish.
52. In the big scheme, this is not a lot, when considering a 6 DBL at 800g equals 4.8 kgs, and at the existing 3 DBL it is 2.4 kgs. Hardly worth putting the boat in the water!
53. Recreational fishers have demonstrated a clear willingness to conserve fish, so people who do not need 6 fish will not likely take their bag limit, if the DBL is increased.
54. However, under the current management regime there is a disincentive for fishers to conserve fish because every fish landed is one less counted in overall recreational harvest estimates, and one more fish available to allocate as commercial quota.
55. The NZSFC objects to fish conserved by recreational interests being used to prop up wasteful commercial fishing methods. To encourage conservation we must have better recognition of our recreational, fishing and environmental interests, not just estimated catch.