



Office of Hon Nathan Guy

MP for Otaki

Minister for Primary Industries
Minister of Civil Defence

Associate Minister for Economic Development

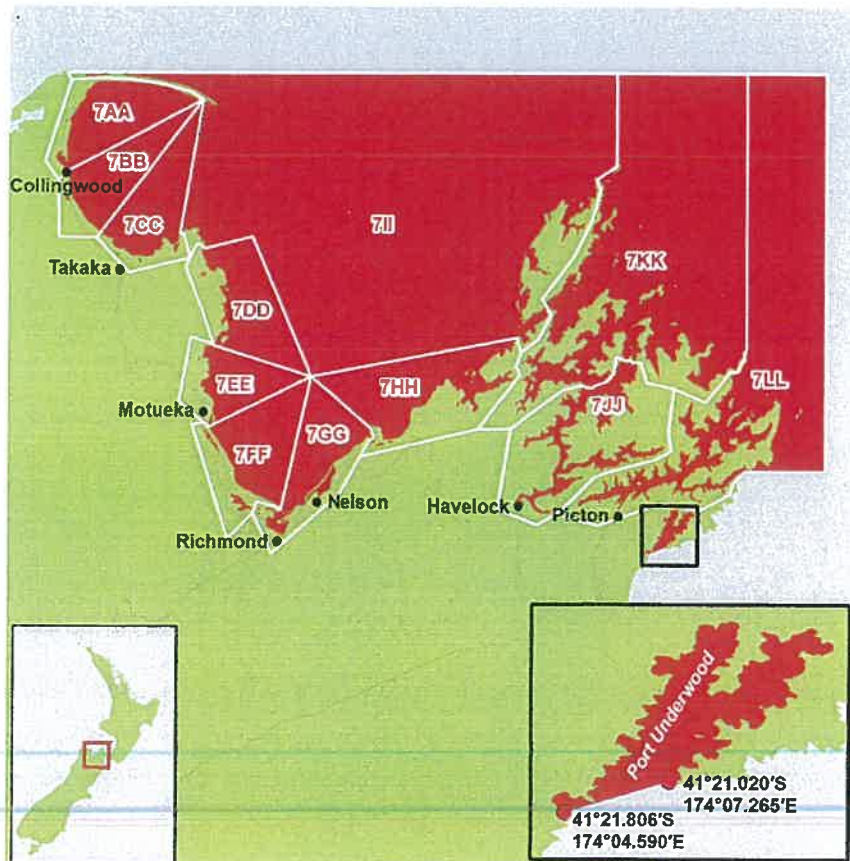
B17-0420

Dear Stakeholder

I write to inform you of my decision to close the Southern Scallop Fishery (SCA 7) and Port Underwood for the 2017-18 season to both recreational and commercial scallop fishing.

Taking into account the best available scientific information and the information and views provided during consultation, I consider a closure to all of SCA 7 and Port Underwood for the coming scallop season to be appropriate. The closure will protect remaining scallop beds from fishing disturbance and prevent further declines in abundance.

A map showing the closed areas is below.



Map showing the areas (in red) to be closed to the taking and possessing of scallops for the 2017-18 Southern Scallop Fishery season.

Fishing is unlikely to be the only driver of decline in SCA 7. Therefore, over the next year, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) will be commissioning research to assess scallop survival and growth across the range of environments within SCA 7, and will implement recommendations from an independent panel of international scientists that was convened last year by MPI.

This research will help determine whether interventions such as reseedling of scallops, re-establishment of reefs, or changes in fishing gear are likely to be successful, as well as determine what role disease and other factors are having in suppressing the productivity of the scallop beds.

Consultation

Copies of the discussion document, other information and papers providing final advice are available on the MPI website www.mpi.govt.nz/news-and-resources/consultations.

MPI worked with a stakeholder group with representatives from recreational and commercial sectors along with input from local iwi, prior to publicly consulting on the proposals contained in the discussion document. I would like to thank these parties for their efforts to support the Southern Scallop Fishery.

In making my decision I have considered the submissions received during consultation, as well as the final advice provided to me by MPI, and the relevant legislative provisions and obligations under the Fisheries Act 1996.

Reasons for my decision

I have become increasingly concerned about the status of SCA 7 which has continued to decline despite measures being taken.

I reduced the Total Allowable Catch, and Total Allowable Commercial Catch for SCA 7 in 2013, and called for measures at that time to support a rebuild of the fishery. However, despite the implementation of reduced commercial catch limits, and other measures, the results of a survey in November 2015 showed the fishery had continued to decline. In response, I subsequently closed parts of SCA 7 (Marlborough Sounds and Area H in Tasman Bay) for the 2016-17 season.

At the end of January 2017, SCA 7 was again surveyed. Results showed the biomass of scallops in SCA 7 had continued to decline to its lowest recorded level, with only a few beds remaining at an economically viable density to fish. The fishery as a whole is likely to be below the 'hard limit'; the point at which MPI policy is to consider closure of the fishery. The biomass in some parts of the Marlborough Sounds that were closed last season may be starting to increase, however it remains close to its lowest recorded biomass level.

Scallop fisheries can fluctuate naturally, however, the fishery has followed a trend of decline and remains around the same level where I considered it was necessary to close parts of the fishery last season. Many of the submissions received during consultation considered that two or more years may be required before any rebuild of the fishery is seen.

There are some remaining dense beds in the Marlborough Sounds, which are likely to be the areas targeted for fishing should the fishery be opened. I am concerned that these are, however, also key areas for scallop reproduction as scallops need to be at sufficient density to ensure breeding success. Depletion of these beds or disturbance by fishing this season could exacerbate the decline of the fishery.

Submissions, especially from Port Underwood residents, confirmed the need to prevent a transfer of scallop fishing effort to the small scallop stocks in Port Underwood and I have therefore supported closing this area.

Research and Management

In the last few months MPI has convened scientific workshops to collate and discuss available information on the factors affecting scallops in SCA 7, and to develop a coordinated research and management plan for the fishery.

A consensus is emerging that the environment in many parts of SCA 7 has changed over the last 15 years and no longer supports healthy scallop beds. There is some evidence that the drivers of this change include a range of anthropogenic impacts alongside fishing.

This situation is not unique to SCA 7, and many scallop fisheries overseas are also seeing such impacts. These fisheries are being routinely partially or completely closed as part of ongoing management strategies, and restrictions are being placed on the gear that may be used in sensitive habitats. In some cases, interventions such as reef enhancement are being trialled.

In the short term, a further closure of the SCA 7 fishery is consistent with international best practise for managing scallop fisheries and has been used in the past to help rebuild SCA 7. In the medium term, however, the focus of research and management should be on assessing the relationship between the SCA 7 environment, the fishing methods used in SCA 7, and the health of the scallop beds.

Therefore, over the next year, MPI will be commissioning research to assess scallop survival and growth across a range of environmental gradients in Tasman and Golden Bay, and in the Marlborough Sounds. This will help determine whether interventions such as reseedling of scallops, re-establishment of shell reefs, and changes to fishing gear are likely to be successful, as well as determine what role disease and other factors may be having in suppressing the productivity of the scallop beds.

MPI will also be implementing some recommendations from an independent panel of international scallop scientists that was convened last year by MPI, through a new survey of scallop biomass this coming summer.

Impact of closures

I acknowledge that a further closure will have an impact on stakeholders. This is an important shared fishery, and I have read the submissions from stakeholders and tangata whenua, both in support and in opposition to the closure, and the information provided on the extent of this impact.

There is support from most recreational stakeholders and from tangata whenua for the closure, with many submitters indicating they are willing to forgo immediate utilisation of the fishery over the coming season in the interests of the longer-term sustainability and improved future access to the fishery.

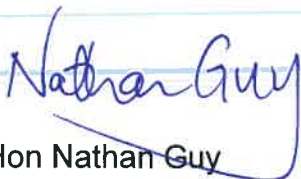
The Challenger Scallop Enhancement Company's (Enhancement Company) submission, as well as supporting submissions, and submissions from diving businesses and charter operators, highlighted the economic impact of a closure on their businesses. I understand that there will be an impact on annual return for commercial fishers from my decision, but note that the long term economic value of the fishery relies on its sustainability. While the company would prefer that a decision on a closure is deferred pending a further survey, this would only assess the few remaining dense beds in the Marlborough Sounds where a slight increase is already projected and taken into account in my decision. Delaying a decision to allow for such a survey would compromise the effectiveness of the closure, as these beds would be open to fishing in the interim.

While some submissions (from both recreational and commercial sectors) suggested the closure should apply only to one sector, I consider the closures should apply to both recreational and commercial sectors to ensure scallops can spawn and grow without fishing disturbance.

Other proposals

Some submitters suggested alternative measures or options that were not consulted on. These relate to regulatory changes that require more time to develop and implement. They will be worked through by MPI in consultation with fishery stakeholders over the coming months. There was support in submissions for continuation of a stakeholder group to develop these longer term proposals to manage the fishery. Such a group would consider the feedback on the longer term measures submitted during consultation. Any proposals would be subject to wider engagement and consultation to gauge stakeholder and public views before any decisions are made.

Yours sincerely



Hon Nathan Guy
Minister for Primary Industries