

24 August 2006

Dear Fishery Stakeholder

2006 IN-SEASON TAC REVIEW FOR THE COROMANDEL SCALLOP FISHERY

This letter outlines the reasons for my final decisions on the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the Coromandel scallop fishery for the 2006 season. The Coromandel scallop fishery occupies the area from Cape Rodney in the Hauraki Gulf to Town Point in the Bay of Plenty.

On the basis of the research survey conducted in May this year, I have decided to increase the TAC for the Coromandel scallop fishery from 48 tonnes meatweight to 189 tonnes meatweight. The TAC increase has been allocated as follows:

- the recreational fishing allowance is increased from 7.5 to 15 tonnes meatweight;
- the customary Maori fishing allowance is increased from 7.5 to 15 tonnes meatweight;
- the allowance for other sources of fishing-related mortality is increased from 11 to 41 tonnes meatweight;
- the Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE) for quota owners is increased from 22 to 118 tonnes meatweight;
- at the end of the current fishing year for the Coromandel scallop fishery, the TAC will revert to 48 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for recreational fishing will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for customary fishing will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for other sources of fishing-related mortality will revert to 11 tonnes meatweight, and the ACE will revert to 22 tonnes meatweight.

The change to the TAC and the creation of additional ACE to quota owners should take effect in late August. The Ministry of Fisheries will advise quota owners by letter of the exact date once this is known. The commercial fishing season for the Coromandel scallop fishery closes each year from 20 December. The recreational scallop-fishing season closes each year from 14 February.

In reaching my final decisions for the 2006 season, I carefully considered the available fishery assessment information, advice from the Ministry, and the issues and information put forward by sector groups in submissions. I also had regard to the legislative provisions of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act), especially the sections relating to the purpose of the Act, the environmental and information principles, and the setting and amending of sustainability measures.

The Fisheries Act imposes an obligation to provide for the utilisation of fisheries resources as long as sustainability is ensured. The Coromandel scallop fishery is listed on the Second Schedule of the Act, which enables an in-season increase to the TAC when this is sustainable. The research survey that was conducted in May indicates that additional yield will be available from the fishery for the remainder of the 2006 season. It is good news that research surveys have shown a significant increase in the

biomass of the Coromandel scallop fishery since 2000. It is also good that the tubeworm population that affected the fishery in the late 1990s has declined considerably.

To their credit, commercial quota owners have again taken a precautionary approach when they proposed a modest increase to the available ACE to the commercial sector. Most sector groups supported the proposed ACE increase.

Opinion was varied amongst the sector groups regarding the increase in the non-commercial allowances. In my view, the most compelling factor is that there has been a significant increase in the biomass of the scallop fishery. I note that the research survey results relate primarily to the scallop beds mainly fished by the commercial sector. However, trends in scallop abundance in the “recreational” scallop beds are likely to be similar to abundance trends for the surveyed beds. This assumption is currently being tested by directed research. An increased recreational catch can be expected if scallop biomass has increased in recreational areas. I also note that recreational fishers are able to access the main scallop areas if they choose.

Given that the recreational catch is likely to increase, it is therefore reasonable to increase the recreational allowance. However, I have decided not to increase the recreational allowance by the same proportion as the increase in ACE to commercial fishers – slightly more than a five-fold increase. The reason is that the Ministry of Fisheries considers it unlikely the recreational catch could actually increase by such a significant amount. Instead, a more realistic scenario is that the recreational catch might double when scallop abundance is high. Therefore, the recreational allowance will be increased from 7.5 to 15 tonnes meatweight.

There is no quantitative information available on the overall tonnage of Coromandel scallops taken by Maori customary fishers. In the absence of quantitative catch information and where the fishery is of known importance to Maori, the Ministry has a general criterion that the recreational allowance be used as a benchmark to set the customary allowance. I see no strong reason to depart from this general policy for Coromandel scallops. Therefore, the Maori customary allowance will also be increased from 7.5 to 15 tonnes meatweight. Both non-commercial allowances will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight at the end of the current fishing year for the Coromandel scallop fishery (31 March 2007).

In 2005, I decided not to increase the daily bag limit from 20 to 30 scallops per fisher because of the lack of quantitative information on this issue. I am pleased to note that a start has been made to collect better information on the non-commercial fishery. A dive survey was recently completed by NIWA for the Ministry for some of the main recreational fishing beds – inside Kawau Island in the Hauraki Gulf, and The Cove and Opito Bay in the Whitianga area. The results should be available in the near future. Possible changes to the amateur bag limit could be considered as part of the proposed Fisheries Plan for the Coromandel scallop fishery being developed for consultation with stakeholders.

I thank you for your interest in the management of the Coromandel scallop fishery. It is pleasing that there has been such an improvement in the fishery since 2000, and that all stakeholders can share in some of the benefits of the improvement.

Yours sincerely

Jim Anderton
Minister of Fisheries