

In-season review of the Coromandel scallop TAC

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Re - In-season review of the Coromandel scallop TAC. Submission from Mt Maunganui Sport Fishing Club

Mt Maunganui Sport Fishing Club has 1714 members, the Papamoa-Motiti scallop beds are literally right on our front door, commercial dredging is very visible from anywhere along the beach, these scallop beds are an important part of the fishery here not only for gathering scallops but also for feed that attracts many other marine species (primarily snapper) to the area which congregate amongst the papa reef systems that stretch along the sandy coastline.

After reading the 2010 MFish Initial Position Paper (IPP) on the In-season review of the Coromandel scallop TAC we would like to express the following concerns.

The Minister must be advised that the fishery, and the Papamoa/Motiti scallop beds in particular, are not providing for the social, economic and cultural well-being of local residents, the wider Coromandel population or that of our family, friends and visitors.

We recommend a more cautious management approach is taken to protect and enhance this important, depleted local fishery.

All of our comments are directed at our local scallop beds only, which include Papamoa Beach & Motiti Island areas. Many of our members dive on these beds and their feedback is consistent with the points that we are making.

1 – We do not support a commercial in-season ACE (Annual Catch Entitlement) increase from 22t to 95 or 100t.

We are very concerned the research indicates low density in the beds off Waiheke, Waihi and Papamoa/Motiti. There is no evidence at all that these beds can sustain any increased commercial extraction, recreational divers in the area have noticeably seen huge decreases of abundance of scallops, some struggling to gather their limit catch of 20 on one tank of air.

Survey results from the past 4-5 yrs for our local beds show consistent depletion in scallop numbers and something needs to be done NOW to save them from further depletion.

We want to know what MFish is going to do about the consistent mass depletion of scallops in our area.

If there is to be any increase for the whole of the Coromandel scallop fishery then that additional commercial fishing effort should be directed towards areas with higher scallop abundance, such as the Mercury region.

We recommend that at a minimum you should immediately recommend that all commercial dredges are prohibited from the Papamoa-Motiti beds until future survey results show that the beds here are recovering to a state that can be sustainably managed.

2 – We are very concerned at the blatant destruction caused by poorly designed commercial dredges of the fragile papa reefs off Papamoa beach. These precious papa reef systems have evolved over many years and provide much needed shelter and essential habitat for many marine species, they are wiped out in a second with a pass of these unacceptable dredges. Ask yourself would this be acceptable practice if it were to take place on land where it's all visible for everyone to see?

We strongly recommend that new dredge technologies should be developed and a plan initiated to replace all current destructive dredges to minimise the damage to the marine environment.

3 – Based on an in-season increase an estimated mortality rate of 34 percent for commercial dredging is extremely high and totally unacceptable. The estimated combined recreational and customary harvest is well below this mortality estimate. This highlights the destructive nature of these out-dated Victorian box dredges and reinforces the need to develop more environmentally-friendly technology.

Again we strongly recommend that fishing related mortality is reduced to the bare minimum.

4 - The Coromandel scallop fishery is far too big an area to manage in one basket and the two main areas are worlds apart. Decisions made for the whole management area, stretching from Little Barrier to Papamoa, have massive effects on individual beds, especially the Papamoa-Motiti beds that are currently in very poor shape.

We recommend, in the interests of sustainability, that the Papamoa-Motiti beds are managed separately from the main Coromandel scallop fishery.

5 - Have starfish been identified in the surveys as a bycatch?

We believe starfish are one of the biggest threats to our scallop beds. There are many thousands of starfish, we see them when we are diving for scallops, and they need to be eradicated.

We recommend that a study be conducted into the numbers and effects starfish populations have on shellfish beds and that any results are reported and acted on.

6- We understand that there has been recent regulatory changes that now require reporting of customary harvest. We look forward to a more robust regime that reflects customary harvest in this important scallop fishery. A more accurate estimate of customary harvest will enable the Minister to fulfill his necessary function of 'allowing for' all mortality caused by fishing, including customary harvest.

Regards
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