

11 August 2005

Dear Fishery Stakeholder

2005 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 2005 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 239 tonnes meatweight. The TAC increase has been allocated as follows:

- the allowance for recreational fishing is increased from 7.5 to 40 tonnes meatweight;
- the allowance for customary Maori fishing is increased from 7.5 to 40 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 early to mid 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 2005 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 2005 season. It is good news that the research survey has shown a significant increase in the biomass of the Coromandel scallop fishery. It is also encouraging to hear that the tubeworm population that affected the fishery in the late 1990s appears to have declined considerably.

To their credit, commercial quota owners have again taken a pre-cautionary approach when they proposed a modest increase to the available ACE to the commercial sector. All 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. Due to the increased scallop biomass, an increased recreational catch could be attained from a number of factors. For example, it is likely that existing fishers will fish more frequently for scallops.

Given that the recreational catch is likely to increase, it is therefore reasonable to increase the recreational allowance. Accordingly, I decided to increase the recreational allowance by the same proportion as the increase in ACE to commercial fishers – slightly more than a five-fold increase.

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 of Fisheries 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 was also increased from 7.5 to 40 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 2006).

Finally, I am aware that there has been some initial discussion amongst stakeholders regarding the proposed changes to some of the amateur fishing regulations affecting the scallop fishery. In particular, the “primary taker” regulation, the requirement for SCUBA divers to measure scallops on the seafloor, the regulation preventing fishers from processing scallops at sea, and the proposed increase in the daily bag limit from 20 to 30 scallops per fisher. I look forward to considering stakeholder submissions and to making decisions on these management proposals in the near future.

I thank you for your interest in the management of the Coromandel scallop fishery. It's great that there has been such an improvement in the Coromandel scallop fishery, and that now all stakeholders can share in some of the benefits of the improvement.

Yours sincerely

Hon David Benson-Pope
Minister of Fisheries