



Draft Southern Scallop Strategy: Marlborough Sounds

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ISBN No: 978-1-98-859435-4 (online)

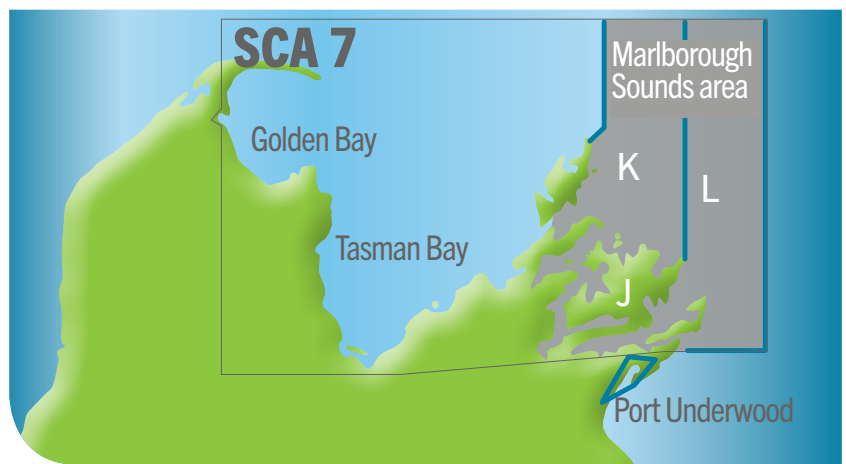
ISBN No: 978-1-98-859434-7 (print)

ISSN No: 2624-0165 (online)

This publication is also available on the Ministry for Primary Industries website at
www.mpi.govt.nz/news-and-resources/publications

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New Zealand Government



How did we get here?

Scallops are a shellfish delicacy that is precious to many New Zealanders. They are an important kaimoana species for tangata whenua and have long been a sought-after species for commercial and recreational fishers.

The Quota Management Area for SCA 7 encompasses the Marlborough Sounds, Golden Bay and Tasman Bay at the top of the South Island (Te Tau Ihu – see map). Scallops have been commercially fished in this area since the 1950s, and SCA 7 was introduced into the Quota Management System (QMS) in 1992.

At that time, the Golden and Tasman Bay fisheries were managed as rotationally fished and enhanced, and subsequently established as such under sections 14 and 310 of the Fisheries Act (1996). Enhancement of Tasman Bay and Golden Bay by the Challenger Scallop Enhancement Company (CSEC) was conducted by reseedling (adding to) scallop populations with scallop spat from collector bags suspended in the water column in Tasman Bay and Golden Bay. Enhancement continues in these bays at a significantly reduced scale, to this day. Recent natural recruitment of scallops on the seabed has been low in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay, probably due to the large amount of unsuitable scallop habitat now evident in these areas.

Historically, the bulk of the commercial harvest was taken from Golden Bay and Tasman Bay. The Marlborough Sounds harvest was a relatively small proportion of the overall commercial catch. However, in the early to mid 2000s the scallop fisheries in Golden and Tasman Bays declined dramatically. In 2011 and 2016, CSEC ceased fishing in Tasman Bay and Golden Bay, respectively. The commercial fishing catch from the Marlborough Sounds peaked in 2009 and thereafter followed a declining trend. In 2016, a temporary partial area closure was put in place over

the Marlborough Sounds Area, which was then extended to all of SCA 7 in 2017. The SCA 7 fishery is now closed until such a time that the Minister deems it recovered enough to support fishing activity.

Research surveys have shown negligible scallop abundance in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay. However, surveys of the Marlborough Sounds in 2017 and 2018 showed signs of recovering scallop biomass. There is a need to develop integrated research and management plans, including a regime that allows for utilisation while ensuring the rebuilding biomass in the Marlborough Sounds is not compromised, should the Marlborough Sounds component of the SCA 7 fishery reopen. To achieve this, in 2018 the Minister of Fisheries requested that the Southern Scallop Working Group (SSWG) be set up. The SSWG brings together Iwi, commercial and recreational sectors of the fishery, scientists and fisheries managers, and provides an inclusive platform for input into the future management of the fishery.

The SSWG has put together this draft strategy to outline the group's immediate priority, which is to ensure that any future scallop fishing activity in the Marlborough Sounds is sustainable, and allows the fishery to rebuild to healthy levels.

What we've been hearing about SCA 7

Over the last few years, Fisheries New Zealand has run a number of consultation processes and public information sessions on the SCA 7 fishery.

We've heard concerns about:

- the impacts of scallop dredging on the environment (and on scallop abundance);
- the rules and regulations surrounding the fishery (such as daily bag limits, season length, and size limits); and

- the impacts of non-fishing activities on scallops, particularly sedimentation.

The Southern Scallop Working Group has developed this strategy with these concerns in mind, in such a way that it also meets the objectives of the Fisheries Act 1996; to provide for utilisation while ensuring sustainability.



Why do we need a strategy?

The fishery has changed

The overall SCA 7 stock has struggled to recover to healthy biomass levels, and the fishery is currently closed. The remaining biomass resides primarily in Marlborough Sounds, and we need to be cautious about how we conduct any future fishing activity, to ensure fishing is sustainable, allowing scallop populations to rebuild to healthy levels.

Current management settings for the fishery were put in place when the Tasman Bay and Golden Bay fisheries were rotationally fished, and supported by enhancement. While a few scallop beds remain persistent, many others have undergone substantial declines, such as those in large, formerly highly productive areas of Golden and Tasman Bays, and parts of the Marlborough Sounds.

The benthic environment in these areas appears to have changed over the last 30 years and is no longer able to support healthy scallop beds. For example, the photos below illustrate the difference between suitable and unsuitable scallop habitat. There is some evidence that, as for many overseas scallop fisheries, the drivers of this change include a range of human-induced impacts, including fishing and land-based impacts.

Now, the few remaining unenhanced viable beds are concentrated in the Marlborough Sounds, and the current fisheries management settings may no longer be appropriate for a small fishery which has been closed for several years due to sustainability reasons.

Figure 1: Photos taken in SCA 7 in 2018. The photo on the left displays habitat that no longer supports healthy scallop populations. The photo on the right displays healthy, complex habitat which supports scallops.



Discussion questions:

Do you agree with the reasons that we have given above for why a strategy is needed? If not, why not?

Are there others that should be considered? If so, what are they and why?

What are we proposing?

We want to rebuild scallop populations in Te Tau Ihu, with an immediate focus on the Marlborough Sounds.

Our aim is to ensure that any future fishing activity is sustainable, and allows the fishery to continue rebuilding towards a healthy level. The Southern Scallop Working Group has identified the following key objectives for the Marlborough Sounds (to be further refined during consultation):

- Set an appropriate biomass threshold for reopening (the biomass threshold is the point at which the abundance of scallops is considered sufficient to support a fishery).
- Set effective catch measures for scallop harvesting based on a sustainable exploitation rate (this rate is the proportion of scallops that is taken from a population).
- Minimise the fishing impacts on scallop habitat and populations through refugia (closed areas) and limiting fishing methods (such as dredging).
- Get better catch information.
- Improve scallop habitat quality and quantity in the Marlborough Sounds. This could include active restoration.
- Address the non-fishing impacts on scallops (e.g. land-based impacts, alternative uses of marine space and disease).



Discussion questions:

Do you agree with the overall aim? If not, why not?

Do you agree with the objectives? If not, why not?

Are there other objectives that should be considered? And if so, what are they and why?

In more detail: the risks and how we plan to address them

The Southern Scallop Working Group has workshopped the key risks to the sustainability of the Marlborough Sounds fishery should it be reopened.

Threshold biomass for reopening is set too low (i.e. it's opened to fishing before scallop populations have recovered enough)

It is proposed that the threshold biomass for reopening, in other words, the point at which the abundance of scallops is considered sufficient to support a fishery, be based on a time period when scallop populations were considered to be healthy in the past. Biomass based limits¹ and an analysis of the risks to sustainability will be used to set the threshold biomass for reopening, and to continually monitor the fishery. A more comprehensive approach that takes into account environmental changes and the desirability of managing scallops at a finer scale will also be considered.

The target exploitation rate is too high, resulting in too many scallops being harvested

We are currently researching an appropriate sustainable exploitation rate for the Marlborough Sounds fishery

that will also be based on a time period when scallop populations were considered to be healthy in the past. This exploitation rate would need to be set at an appropriate spatial scale. Initially, we propose to set a cautious interim exploitation rate below the target exploitation rate to allow the stock to rebuild further. Rules will be set to prevent scallop harvest exceeding the interim exploitation rate, and monitoring will be conducted by collecting scallop biomass information to see how the stock responds.

The current monitoring plan includes annual biomass surveys of scallops in the Marlborough Sounds. We will see if these could be better designed to maximise the information from the surveys. This could include collecting habitat information, or diving (instead of dredging) to collect biomass information.

Adequate information on how many scallops are taken by each sector (customary, commercial and recreational) each year is also needed.

¹ Under Fisheries New Zealand's Harvest Strategy Standard, the hard limit describes the point below which the fishery should be considered for closure and the soft limit describes the point below which a formal rebuilding plan needs to be developed. The soft limit is also normally thought of as the minimum biomass that must be achieved before a closed fishery can be re-opened. The Harvest Strategy Standard can be found here: www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/728.



Risk that fishing will exceed harvest allocations

Improving all levels of catch information will be important to mitigate this risk. Commercial take is reported. Historically, in the Top of the South Island it has not been a requirement for customary catch to be reported. The customary sector is working towards solutions to this, and is taking steps to report all customary catch. Monitoring of recreational harvest is not as robust because the recreational sector is not required to report their catch. Fisheries New Zealand collects information infrequently from this sector, every 5 or 6 years through a National Panel Survey of Recreational Fishers. The SSWG is interested in your feedback to explore what options could be considered further that might allow us to better understand recreational take.

Management measures are no longer fit-for-purpose

The catch limits for the fishery sectors will be set based on a sustainable target exploitation rate.

There are also a number of fisheries management measures that are currently used to manage the fishery, which may no longer be fit-for-purpose. These include: daily bag limits, season length, size limits, how catch is reported, and fishing methods (i.e. dredging or diving) and gear requirements (such as dredge size and design). These will be assessed to see if they are still appropriate for this fishery.

We want to be able to make management changes over the right timeframes. Under the current regulatory framework, regulations can take 9 months to a year to change. This does not allow management to be adaptive, or to respond in the time frames necessary for this fishery.

The impacts of fishing on the aquatic environment and scallop sustainability are too large

Some scallop habitats recover quickly from dredging, while others are more sensitive and do not. The remaining scallop beds in the Marlborough Sounds will be categorised in three ways:

- resilient to regular rotational harvesting;
- can sustain periodic rotational fishing that will allow for longer recovery times; and
- predisposed to dredging impacts and may not be appropriate to dredge.

Measures which are designed to increase the amount of scallop habitat will be considered to ensure the Marlborough Sounds fishery continues to rebuild.



Discussion questions on recreational information:

Do you support or oppose that we need better recreational fishing information in order to effectively manage this scallop fishery?

What are some options to improve our understanding of the recreational scallop catch?

Do you agree with how we have framed the risk associated with a lack of recreational information? If not, why not?

Non-fishing impacts cause scallop abundance to decline

Fishing is not the only factor that can influence scallop abundance and population health. Wider environmental impacts that result in increased sedimentation and turbidity appear to have been important in driving the decline of the fishery. The other factors that may be negatively influencing the fishery will be examined to determine how they can be minimised.

Targeted research plan

We want to know what has been the cause of the observed decline in scallop distribution and abundance. In the short-term, what constitutes good scallop conditions, and what and where interventions (such as reseeded of scallops and habitat restoration) are most likely to be successful may be investigated. Reseeding refers to enhancement of natural scallop

populations by strategically placing spat for harvesting in the future. Habitat restoration could include the placement of scallop shell and other materials to encourage scallop spat settlement and re-establish a healthy scallop ecosystem.

Ongoing research aims to determine whether changes in fishing gear are required, and what role disease and other factors may be having in suppressing the productivity of the scallop beds.

There are a number of research initiatives through the Sustainable Seas Challenge (<https://sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz>). Greater collaboration on the outcomes of this research would allow new research to be targeted where it would be most beneficial.

Discussion questions:



Do you agree with the mitigations that we have proposed for each risk? If not, why not?

Are there specific rules and regulations that you think should be changed for the Marlborough Sounds? If so, what are they and why?

Is there other research that you think should be considered? If so, why?

Are there other mitigations that should be considered?



What now?

The Southern Scallop Working Group is seeking your input into this draft Strategy, to ensure it is addressing the right issues and putting forward the best options to enable the sustainability of the fishery.

Once we have your feedback we will be seeking the Minister's endorsement of the Strategy and, potentially, approval of a more detailed version of this strategy as a fisheries plan under s 11A of the Fisheries Act and:

- developing an integrated research and management plan to align with the objectives and risks identified in the Strategy;
- seeking the Minister's and Cabinet's approval to consult on any regulatory changes that arise from the Strategy;
- designing a pathway and working with the community and recreational fishers on options to improve recreational catch data; and

- identifying how to make rule changes in the fishery more responsive.

We will monitor the performance of any management changes that are made, and continually review them. Once the strategy is finalised, the Southern Scallop Working Group will start to consider an approach to managing and restoring the Golden Bay and Tasman Bay scallop fisheries, which includes the Croisilles Harbour. These areas have not been considered as part of this strategy as their biomass remains negligible, and the immediate priority was identified as the Marlborough Sounds.



We are seeking your feedback and input

We are seeking your input into this Strategy, and would like to hear from you. You can email us at

FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz

Or, you can participate in our online survey:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/TSB5F5G

Stay informed

You can keep up-to-date and find out about our progress at www.fisheries.govt.nz/protection-and-response/sustainable-fisheries/the-southern-scallop-fishery-sca-7

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