



**SEAFOOD INDUSTRY
COUNCIL**

The New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd

SUBMISSION ON

MINISTRY OF FISHERIES

RESEARCH CO-ORDINATING
COMMITTEE MEETING
8 and 9 OCTOBER 2008

AND

PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECTS FOR 2009/10

3 November 2008

INTRODUCTION

- 1. The New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd ('SeaFIC') makes this submission on the Fisheries Research Services (FRS) for 2009/10 on behalf of the commercial seafood industry. SeaFIC is the primary umbrella organisation representing the generic interests of all sectors of the New Zealand seafood industry. Our shareholders collectively represent around 95% of the seafood industry by value.**
- 2. This submission has been compiled by SeaFIC staff in consultation with relevant members of the seafood industry and incorporates points raised at the Research Coordinating Committee ('RCC') meeting on 8 and 9 October 2008. While we have incorporated the views of other industry bodies, they will nevertheless make representations on their own behalf. We begin by making some generic comments in Part 1. Part 2 of the submission addresses specific research proposals where warranted.**

PART I GENERIC COMMENTS

Resource Constraints Warrant Strategic Approach

- 3. The Ministry's research appropriation has been relatively stable for the past five years. While the Ministry has sought new policy bids to increase the amount available for spending on fisheries information, those bids have been in large unsuccessful. Even when the new policy bid contained high priority, politically sensitive projects, such as last year's Hector's and Maui's Dolphin project, the bids have been unsuccessful.**

| VOTE: FISHERIES | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| FISHERIES INFORMATION | | | | | |
| Appropriation | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
| | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Baseline | 33.8 | 29.6 | 29.1 | 29.9 | 30.0 |
| New Policy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Total | 33.8 | 29.6 | 29.1 | 29.9 | 31.0 |

- 4. Our discussions with the Treasury in the past have highlighted the poor export performance, the low prospects of future growth and the low level of promotion of the sector as major factors limiting the Ministry's appropriation. In essence, the Ministry was being funded on a maintenance only basis with new funding approvals related to Ministry operations rather than investment in additional research. While the fall in the dollar will assist export returns, industry does not see any significant volume change to the export prospects for the fishing sector in the near future and therefore we must expect that current views of the industry's prospects will continue.**

- 5. With the economic problems that have emerged in the recent past and the need for restraint in government spending, it is unlikely that the Ministry will be any more favourably treated in the future, either under a Labour led Government or under a National led Government, than it has been treated in the past. Given the excessive level of project bids presented to the RCC and the inability to even fund those considered to have high priority, the Ministry must take a strategic approach to the allocation of its scarce funding resources. With over 600 QMS stocks to manage, contentious aquatic environment and protected species issues to address, and the competing calls for funding, it is not acceptable for the Ministry take anything other than a strategic approach to the allocation of research funds. The status quo approach of allocating funds to research areas based on the proportional allocations of previous years indicates a lack of the strategic planning which is necessary for proper management of New Zealand fisheries.**
- 6. Industry has previously sought a strategic approach to the allocation of fisheries research funding and the request has been ignored by the Ministry. The allocation of research funding is not a “feel good” exercise, designed to ensure all parties get a share of the available funds. Instead, it a process by which we can get the most value out of what will continue to be a limited pool of resources.**
- 7. We have previously raised the issue of the lack of a strategic plan for fisheries research. Such a plan would provide all stakeholders with some clarity and understanding as to the direction of research and the prioritisation of research spending.**
- 8. The Ministry has commented that the prioritisation and allocation of research funding are matters for the Ministry to determine. We disagree most strongly. Industry is levied for over 75% of the Fisheries Information costs, and consequently we have a strong interest in how those funds are allocated and spent. Since the Research Co-ordinating Committee has been denied the opportunity to prioritise the various projects before it and thus allocate the available funds, we have no means to influence the allocation of funds, yet we must pay for the services.**
- 9. In previous submissions, we have highlighted the lack of management objectives driving the research needs. The Ministry promotes the view that the management related deficiencies will be addressed by the development of Fish Plans. We have no confidence that the Ministry’s Fish Plan initiative will provide any greater direction to the Ministry for the allocation of research funds. As with any regulatory changes identified by Fish Plans, the meeting of research needs must remain subject to an external prioritisation such as would arise from a Research Strategic Plan.**

- 10. While industry would have liked to have been able to incorporate into this submission a draft research strategic plan addressing the critical deficiencies and priority issues currently facing fisheries management, in the time available to prepare this submission, industry has not been able to undertake that task. Given that the Minister need not make decisions on the approval of research projects until May or June of next year, industry believes that there is sufficient time available for a strategic plan to be developed to guide the selection of projects for 2009/10. Industry is willing to make suitably skilled and experienced resources available to assist the Ministry in that task.**
- 11. To assist the Ministry in its consideration of such a plan, we have provided some tentative views. We consider that high priority for research funding would apply to projects which address:**
- (i) Stock assessment issues in leading fish stocks where there are sustainability or utilisation that need to be addressed;**
 - (ii) Recreational catch estimates;**
 - (iii) Maui and Hector dolphin population information - abundance, distribution and biology research (assuming this research cannot be funded elsewhere);**
 - (iv) Efficacy of mitigation measures.**
- 12. Conversely, we consider that low priority for research funding should not include projects which relate to:**
- (i) Stock assessment issues in obscure fish stocks where there are no sustainability or utilisation that need to be addressed;**
 - (ii) Characterisations of regional recreational fishing;**
 - (iii) Baseline population research for other protected species;**
 - (iv) Projects promoted by research providers or science advisers independent of management needs**

MFish response

The Ministry again notes the comments from SeaFIC concerning the need for a strategic research plan. The research planning process is designed to maximise the input from stakeholders and the Ministry values the input from these groups. However, the Ministry remains of the opinion that it is the role of the Ministry to advise the Minister on the priorities for the range of research needs competing for restricted resources. Fisheries Plans involving all stakeholders will assist in identifying research and other information needs in a strategic, objectives-based framework, although this will not overcome the need for prioritization and some sort of integration exercise to ensure resources are appropriately targeted.

The Ministry targets a very high proportion of its budget each year on stock assessment or related research. Much of this is focussed on “leading fish stocks”, as SeaFIC suggests it should be, but there will always be a need to

monitor other stocks and fisheries to assess the extent to which there are “sustainability or utilisation (issues?)”. Without some research or monitoring, it is extremely hard to know if there are problems in a stock, whether it be leading or obscure.

The Ministry agrees that developing catch estimates for recreational fisheries is a high priority, but notes that local characterisations and information on “values” are also needed to develop management responses to issues as they arise. An appropriate balance must be struck between these competing needs for information on recreational fisheries, just as a balance needs to be struck between stock assessment research and research on the effects of fishing.

The Ministry also agrees with SeaFIC that understanding the population biology of protected species can be a high priority research topic if we are to understand the risks posed by fishing-related mortality. Baseline population-level data provide a necessary benchmark against which to assess potential fishing-related impacts, and this information is needed in order for the Ministry to fulfil its obligation of avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of fishing on the aquatic environment.

It is less clear why SeaFIC singles out Hector’s and Maui’s dolphins as a high priority and considers other protected species a low priority. For example, some risk assessments suggest that sea lion and certain seabird populations are at a level of risk equal to or higher than that for dolphins. Understanding and improving the effectiveness of mitigation measures is, of course, important, but the Ministry considers this must proceed alongside research aimed at understanding risk.

The Ministry does not commission research promoted by research providers or science advisers independent of management needs. Some ideas come to the research planning process from science working groups or direct from research providers but all are subject to the same assessment and prioritisation processes.

Accepting Responsibility for Other Government Agencies Obligations

- 13. We have previously commented that the Ministry should not accept the obligations that arise from other Crown agencies, such as Department of Conservation (“DOC”) and Ministry for the Environment, abdicating their roles in respect of the marine environment.**
- 14. The Department of Conservation is the Crown agency charged with the management of New Zealand’s protected species. It is not open to them to therefore withdraw from funding research relating to the management of those species. We note DOC’s significant involvement with terrestrial protected species and its interest in assisting international protected species agencies. These contrast starkly with its extremely limited programme of research into marine protected species such as dolphins, seabirds and fur seals.**

- 15. In recent years the Ministry of Fisheries has been contracting an increasing amount of research in this area. This includes:**
- (i) ENV2004/06: aerial surveys of the distribution and abundance of Maui's dolphin**
 - (ii) ENV2005/09: field research on the Chatham Albatross, collecting data on population growth rates, adult survival, inter-breeding survival, mortality due to predation at the colony, fecundity and the range and extent of foraging movements.**
 - (iii) PRO2006/01: long-term (5 year) field studies of Chatham Island albatross, Pacific albatross, Northern royal albatross, Salvin's albatross, various Antipodes Islands seabirds, Flesh-footed shearwaters, White-capped albatross and the Westland petrel, gathering data on population size and trend, survival and breeding rates, distribution at sea, foraging activity and diet.**
- 16. Further research on seabird, dolphin, and fur seal distribution and abundance was specified in the Ministry's Statement of Intent in 2007 and 2008 but not tendered due to budget constraints. The Research Co-ordinating Committee on 9 October 2008 considered that research on Hector's/Maui's dolphin and fur seals on the West Coast of the South Island had a high priority.**
- 17. We recognise that the Ministry has an obligation under section 15 of the Act to manage the impact of fishing on the aquatic environment. We recognise that that obligation requires a need for information on the protected species in order to assess whether there are adverse effects of incidental mortality from fishing. However, we believe there is a fundamental division between the Ministry's responsibilities and those of DOC.**
- 18. It is DOC's responsibility to manage protected species. Management of those species requires information on population abundance, breeding performance and mortalities. The responsibility to obtain information on which the impact of fishing activity can be assessed is the domain of DOC. It is the Ministry's responsibility under the Fisheries Act to ensure that such effects as may be considered to be adverse are avoided, remedied or mitigated. It is not the Ministry's responsibility to undertake research as to whether the effects are adverse – that lies with DOC.**
- 19. We recognise that DOC has chosen to abdicate its responsibilities to marine protected species and can understand the desire of the Ministry to ensure that it meets its responsibilities to marine mammals and seabirds. However, the Ministry is not resourced to meet the obligations of other agencies and a diversion of its resources to meet the responsibility of other agencies is not acceptable when the Ministry has insufficient funds to meet its own obligations that arise directly from the Fisheries Act.**

- 20. We recommend that the Ministry seek Cabinet direction as to where the responsibility for the management and funding of protected species should lie.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's suggestions that it is not the Ministry's responsibility to undertake research as to whether the effects of fishing on protected species are adverse, and that this work should be funded by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Although DOC has a specific mandate for work on protected species, the Ministry has a general mandate for management and research on the effects of fishing on the aquatic environment (for which Section 2 of the Fisheries Act provides a definition that includes all aquatic life, including seabirds). Further, the definition of "effect" in Section 2 is very broad and includes direct, indirect, past, present, future, cumulative, and potential effects of fishing. Also, the definition of "fisheries services" includes (part c) "research relating to ... stock assessment and the effects of fishing" (not necessarily "adverse effects"). Thus, the Ministry cannot agree with SeaFIC's proposition that the Ministry's responsibility under the Fisheries Act is limited to ensuring that "such effects as may be considered to be adverse" are avoided, remedied or mitigated. The Ministry's mandate to conduct the research necessary to understand the risks to the aquatic environment posed by fishing, including on protected species, and to develop and set appropriate standards is clear. If there is a need to understand and manage an effect of fishing, but insufficient information is available or planned, it is part of that mandate to generate the information, contingent on the availability of funds.

There will always be competition for funds and, although funding for aquatic environment projects has increased from a very low baseline in the 1990s, it has averaged just 8% over the past three years and has never exceeded 10% in a year. Only about half of this is spent on protected species research, and all has direct fisheries management application that is consistent with the Fisheries Act, the Ministry's Statement of Intent, and the Strategy for Managing the Environmental Effects of Fishing (SMEEF).

Review of Observer Allocation

- 21. We note that research funds for the Ministry are appropriated under the Fisheries Information output. We also note that there are other services funded from that appropriation, namely, observer services and biodiversity.**
- 22. We find it remarkable that the Ministry continues to fund ever increasing amounts to the observer activity when the Ministry is unable to provide the programmed level of service.**

| VOTE : FISHERIES OBSERVER BUDGET | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
| | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Recovered Services | 2.024 | 2.192 | 2.457 | 2.644 | 3.835 |
| %age increase | | 8.3 | 12.1 | 7.6 | 45.0 |

- 23. Observer services are supplied in response to other service needs, for example , stock assessment and protected species. They are not an output in their own right. With the research budget under extreme pressure, we consider it appropriate that the Ministry should consider the balance between the observer allocation and the available funds for research.**
- 24. The research planning process accomplishes only a nominal review of observer needs and, in reality, the programme is rolled over from year to year with little scrutiny. Whereas other working group proposals for research funding are scrutinised and may be approved/declined/amended, the observer programme is, by comparison, sacrosanct. We cannot accept that the observer service has priority over the wider research needs.**
- 25. We note that the Ministry received a new policy bid of \$6 million in 2008/09 for observer services. The Minister allocated the 2008/09 component of \$1 million to funding for the dolphin initiative and the Ministry appears to be allocating \$2 million to additional observer services in 2009/10.**
- 26. Industry has major reservations as to the operational aspects of this exercise. The Ministry's intent is to provide the 2008/09 service by engaging casual observers, probably students, to provide the services during the January / February 2009 period. Based on the information provided by the Ministry, approximately \$200,000 will be spent on training the observers but those observers will not be expected to become part of the Ministry's ongoing observer activity. In 2009/10 and 2010/11, the Ministry plans to provide the services by growth in its ongoing observer pool. The industry is highly sceptical of the Ministry's ability to effectively double the level of its observer activity given the inability to meet the level of services currently budgeted and unsure why the Ministry would want to double its ongoing capacity when the additional funding is not available beyond 2010/11.**
- 27. Observation of interactions with marine protected species, for example, has been ongoing for some years and further programmes add little or no marginal value to the management of such species. Industry decries the waste of available funding on a questionable exercise. The new policy initiative should have been used to meet the cost of some of the existing observer activity and free baseline funding for a re-allocation to fisheries research to supplement that activity.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments. Aside from Permit-required coverage (VSCF, CCAMLR etc) all Observer coverage requirements are specified by Science and DoC for stock assessment or protected species needs. It is up to Science to decide, in consultation with stakeholders and fisheries managers, the Observer coverage needed to deliver research data.

MFish notes that Observer coverage is part of the research planning process – the robustness of the Observer planning, at a strategic level, is the responsibility of Science. Operational planning (i.e. delivery) is the responsibility of the Observer program.

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's belief that observer coverage related to marine protected species interactions with fishing activities is not the best use of available funding and the implication that research spending should be increased. However, obtaining reliable information on the nature and frequency of interactions between fisheries and protected species is of prime importance in the formulation of management advice. For example, the recent SQU6T Operational Plan relied heavily on a model whose output was dependent on (among other things) the average encounter rate of sea lions with trawl gear. This information was derived almost entirely from observer records. Observer coverage is the most expedient way of obtaining quantitative estimates of interactions with protected species, and the Ministry considers this information to be highly valuable.

Cost Recovery

- 28. Industry has repeatedly raised with the Ministry the issue of cost recovery. In particular we have questioned the issue of general public interest and the treatment of projects related to protected species baseline population research. The Ministry has steadfastly refused to acknowledge industry's position or that there are issues to resolve.**
- 29. Industry submits that all research activities have a general public interest content that should not be cost recovered.**
- 30. It is undeniable that there is a general public interest in the areas of sustainability and utilisation. Were that not true,**
 - (i) Section 8 of the Fisheries Act would make no reference to social, economic and cultural well-being considerations;**
 - (ii) there would be no public debate nor public pressure in respect of the sustainability of fish stocks;**
 - (iii) TAC & TACC decisions would not be reserved to the Minister.**
- 31. The Act requires a balancing of utilisation and sustainability. Industry does not accept that the general public interest is confined solely to the level of the non-commercial utilisation. That excludes or significantly diminishes the general public interest in the sustainability of fish stocks.**

- 32. Where the research arises in respect of international obligations or is related to high seas fishing, the costs should be met by the Crown. International obligations entered into by the Crown need to be accompanied by a commitment to funding. Where there is some catch of highly migratory species in the NZ EEZ, domestic fishers should contribute to the costs of research to provide information for the regional management of those stocks but they should not be solely responsible for the costs.**
- 33. In the case of protected species research where the focus is on obtaining information on the population as a precursor to forming a view that commercial fishing activity is having an adverse effect on the population, that research is wholly general public interest and should not be cost recovered. That approach formed the basis of the Auditor General's findings in respect of cost recovery for Conservation Services.**
- 34. We submit that projects of the following nature, which are commonly cost recovered, primarily reflect the general public interest and should have no cost recovery:**
- (i) Aquatic environment baseline research, including**
 - 1. Protected species population estimates;**
 - 2. Distribution patterns;**
 - 3. Benthic environmental assessments**
 - (ii) Protected species population modelling;**
 - (iii) Development of population management plans; and**
 - (iv) Assessments of the nature and extent of commercial fishing activity impacts;**
- 35. We submit that projects of the following nature, which are commonly cost recovered, have a significant general public interest content and that the project costs should be 50% allocated to Crown funding and 50% cost recovered from industry:**
- (i) Stock assessments and research associated with stock assessments;**
 - (ii) Research undertaken in respect of international obligations where there is fishing in the New Zealand EEZ.**
- 36. We believe the argument over cost-recovery issues has gone on long enough and that industry has been patient, expecting that a principled and lasting outcome would be reached through a review of the cost recovery regime. However, the Ministry has aborted two such reviews (in 2003 and 2007) and there is little evidence that constructive steps are being taken towards the resolution of this long standing matter at this time. Industry is now in the position that it will seek legal advice as to how to progress the issue unilaterally, if necessary by judicial**

proceedings. Industry regrets that such a step needs to be contemplated but the intransigence and dilatory behaviour of the Ministry in respect of cost recovery leaves us with little other choice, particularly when a proper application of the cost recovery principles could reduce the annual cost recovery levies to the Industry by over \$10 million per annum.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns over cost recovery and agrees that Section 262(b) of the Fisheries Act is clear that conservation services or fisheries research services provided in the general public interest cannot be attributed to, and cost recovered from, industry. The Ministry applies the current, regulated Cost Recovery Rules, using the Cost Recovery Principles in the Fisheries Act as a context, and considers that it does not recover the costs of projects provided in the general public interest and does not commission baseline environmental or ecological research that might be considered to be in the general public interest as fisheries services. The Ministry does not accept that cost recovery should not apply to: protected species population estimates; distribution patterns; benthic environmental assessments; protected species population modelling; and assessments of the nature and extent of commercial fishing activity impacts insofar as any of these relate to assessing whether and to what extent fishing activity causes a risk or adverse effect. Given that protected species are killed incidentally in many fisheries, it is incumbent upon the Ministry to gather the necessary data to assess the magnitude and likely consequences of fishing-related impacts. The Ministry therefore considers that population studies are necessary to fulfil its mandate to avoid, remedy, or mitigate any adverse effects of fishing on the aquatic environment

The Ministry's reasoning for this view is that Section 262(d) of the Fisheries Act provides for costs to "be attributed to the persons who caused the risk or adverse effect". Repeatedly, our advice is that this does not limit cost recovery to "proven" adverse effects, because both risks and adverse effects are included in the principles. The Cost Recovery Rules (2001) specifically include "research relating to protected species populations" as an item subject to cost recovery. The definition of "effect" in the Fisheries Act (Section 2) is very broad and includes direct, indirect, past, present, future, cumulative, and potential effects of fishing. Thus, the cost recovery principles in the Act provide for cost recovery to address risks and potential adverse effects. Further, the definition of "fisheries services" includes (part c) "research relating to ... stock assessment and the effects of fishing" (not necessarily "adverse effects"). Thus, the Ministry cannot agree with SeaFIC's proposition that assessing whether and to what extent fishing activity causes a risk or adverse effect is not one of the "services provided to avoid, remedy or mitigate a risk to, or adverse effect on, the aquatic environment or the biological diversity of the aquatic environment (s. 262(d))" and, therefore subject to cost recovery.

The Ministry has considered SeaFIC's suggested dramatic alterations to the cost recovery proposals notified by the Ministry following the RCC. The Ministry does not believe these changes would be consistent with the Cost Recovery Rules or the

Cost Recovery Principles. The Ministry recognizes that the Cost Recovery Rules or Principles may change in the future. In the meantime, the Ministry will continue to operate under the principles laid out in the Fisheries Act and the current regulated rules.

Affordability of Research

- 37. Industry continues to have problems with the affordability of some research projects while the current cost recovery regime remains in place. We have highlighted in numerous RCC, Statement of Intent and levy model submissions the inability of some stocks to bear high levies. In some instances, the research costs have amounted to around 25% of the port price of fish. Despite industry protests, such research has generally to the cost of industry.**
- 38. Our analysis of this issue highlights three factors contributing to the high levies:**
 - (i) the cost of research programmes;**
 - (ii) the disparity between TACC and catch levels in some stocks; and**
 - (iii) the driver of the research.**
- 39. Industry has repeatedly raised issues relating to the cost of research projects. We have previously provided examples of the cost increases for identical projects and the savings that could be achieved by using other providers. The Ministry has indicated that it is preparing a standard for the provision and acceptance of research initiated and directed by industry. We urge that this standard be completed as soon as possible for it offers significant savings over a Ministry initiated provision.**
- 40. The research component also appears to arise from the asymmetric demands for research on TACC adjustments. A TACC reduction promulgated by the Ministry for sustainability grounds appears to have little need for research into the utilisation costs of the proposed measures and a lesser justification for action. Conversely, an industry request for a TACC upward revision is met with a demand for additional research and proof before the matter can be considered. This asymmetry is a major concern to industry and reflects the Ministry's pre-disposition to sustainability rather than the balance of utilisation and sustainability.**
- 41. All too often, despite industry submissions, the research projects will continue, driven on by science processes and support from other participants, such as research providers and Ministry scientists rather than management needs.**
- 42. The Ministry needs to take heed of industry's position and the affordability of research. In some instances, industry has reached a**

view that rather than seek TACC adjustments they are better under the current cost recovery regime not to seek TACC adjustments which are dependent on additional research requirements.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns about the cost of research. The Ministry is bound to follow the rules on, Government procurement, competitive tendering, cost recovery and setting of levies. The ability to direct purchase may help in future in some cases but for many small stocks spreading the cost over a number of years would appear to be the only option to afford the research required.

PART II SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON RESEARCH PROPOSALS

ANTARCTIC FISHERIES

ANT2009/01 Antarctic fisheries

To develop, implement and refine stock assessment approaches for toothfish in the Ross Sea region.

- **This is a critical fishery where sustainability and biological issues exist. The project is supported and warrants priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

OBS2009/01 Research Observer Services – Antarctic Fisheries

To collect specified data describing Antarctic fisheries for Antarctic fisheries research.

- **This is a critical fishery where sustainability and biological issues exist. The project is supported and warrants priority**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

ALB2009/01 Stock monitoring of albacore

To determine the length composition of the commercial catch of albacore (Thunnus alalunga) in New Zealand fisheries waters.

- **We remain concerned that specific objective 4 still specifies “To conduct sampling in fish sheds”. The consensus at the RCC meeting was this project proposal would be re-written and would not specify the type of sampling. We believe the level of cost recovery should only be 50% to reflect the wider international benefits of the project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. Concerning cost recovery the Ministry has applied the current, regulated Cost Recovery Rules

HMS2009/01 Data reports for New Zealand HMS fisheries for international obligations including sharks and full gear and observer descriptions

To characterise the New Zealand tuna fisheries, including catches and discards of associated and dependent species for reporting to International organizations.

- **We support this Crown funded project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. Funding will be from Other Services or from another business group within the Ministry. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

HMS2009/02 Commercial catch sampling programme for highly migratory fish species

To collect biological information describing highly migratory fish species from shore-based fish processing and handling facilities.

- **We support this project and consider that it should be 50% Crown funded due to the international obligations.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. Concerning cost recovery the Ministry has applied the current, regulated Cost Recovery Rules

HMS2009/03 Characterisation of New Zealand fisheries for moonfish and ray's bream

To characterise the New Zealand fisheries for moonfish and ray's bream.

- **While we support the medium priority assigned to this proposal, we believe it should not proceed in 2009/10.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SKJ2009/01 Characterisation of New Zealand fisheries for skipjack tuna

To characterise the New Zealand fisheries for skipjack tuna.

- **We support this proposal but submit there should be Crown funding of 50% in respect of the international component.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project Concerning cost recovery the Ministry has applied the current, regulated Cost Recovery Rules. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

STM2009/01 Multi-year stock monitoring of striped marlin including logbook programme implementation

To monitor recreational fisheries for billfish within New Zealand fisheries waters.

- **We support this project and its high priority status. Striped marlin recreational catches need to be monitored. However, this project may need to be reviewed following the outcomes of the consultation on recreational charter boat registration and reporting.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project and agrees that the need for project may need to be reviewed.

STM2009/02 Characterisation of striped marlin fisheries

To characterise the New Zealand fisheries for striped marlin.

- **With the tight constraints on funding, we believe that this project should be deferred to await the output of project STM2009/01. We believe that this project currently contains a variety of objectives that could usefully be separated and prioritised independently.**
- **There is potential for confusion in the reporting of released catch (of both marlin and other species), and this aspect of the project could be usefully addressed first.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments. However, the project has some urgency as there are moves to develop mitigation measures to reduce marlin catch within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Any mitigation measures can potentially impact on New Zealand fishery operations and without in-depth knowledge of these fisheries it is difficult to provide meaningfully input into the effectiveness of potential measures nor is it possible to counter proposals that adversely impact on New Zealand fishery operations. Finally, without knowing New Zealand impact on the resource and understanding fully our fisheries it is difficult to determine the impact of proposed measures on New Zealand interests. Therefore the Ministry believes that this project should remain a high priority and be progressed as soon as possible.

STN2009/01 Catch-at-age of southern bluefin tuna

*To determine the age composition of the commercial catch of Southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*) in New Zealand fisheries waters.*

- **While we support the project's priority, we submit the project should be 50% Crown funded to recognise the international benefits of the research to the international management of southern bluefin tuna.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. Concerning cost recovery the Ministry has applied the current, regulated Cost Recovery Rules.

TAG2009/01 Management of the gamefish tag recapture programme
To manage and report the data obtained from the co-operative tag recapture programme for gamefish.

- **We do not support this proposal as a research project. It should be considered alongside the Ministry's other data management activities.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project.

HOKI AND MIDDLE DEPTHS FISHERIES

HOK2009/01 Estimation of spawning hoki biomass using acoustic surveys
To estimate the spawning biomass of hoki (Macruronus novaezelandiae) using acoustic surveys.

- **SeaFIC notes that this project would provide a Cook Strait acoustic survey in 2010, following the 2008 survey. SeaFIC considers that a biannual frequency of these surveys is an appropriate measure.**
- **We note that industry vessels have undertaken acoustic surveys of spawning hoki in Cook Strait in 2007 and 2008, and encourage future surveys to be progressed on this basis rather than as a cost recovered service.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The use of industry vessels to conduct acoustic surveys will be considered in future, where shown to be feasible.

GSH2009/01 Age validation of dark and pale ghost sharks
To quantify demographic parameters and the age composition of dark and pale ghost sharks in the New Zealand Exclusive Economic Zone.

- **When weighing up the competing demands for research funding, we consider that this remains a medium priority project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project This project has been rated as Tier 2.

JMA2009/01 Stock assessment of jack mackerels in JMA7

To conduct stock assessments for the two New Zealand species, Trachurus declivis and T. novaezelandiae in JMA 7, including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.

- **We support this project since it will provide valuable management information.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

LIN2009/01 Stock assessment of ling
To carry out stock assessments of ling (Genypterus blacodes) in LIN 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.

- **We support this project but we consider this to be of medium-high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project, but as a medium-high priority. The Ministry considers the ling stock assessment to be high priority but will defer the start of this project one year.

MID2009/01 Characterisation and fishery monitoring of middle depth species
To review the status of middle depth Fishstocks not routinely assessed two species will be chosen each year for review).

- **The Ministry state the project needs to be driven by key management needs. However, for most of the stocks proposed, there are no management needs and the project should be deferred pending further clarification of the management needs.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project In previous years there have been urgent management needs identified. In the current project (MID2008/01) support for the in-season TACC increases for squid is being considered and the fishery for barracouta is being reviewed.

SBW2009/01 Stock assessment of southern blue whiting

To carry out stock assessments of southern blue whiting (Micromesistius australis) including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.

- **We support this project's high priority**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

SBW2009/02 Biomass estimation of southern blue whiting using acoustic surveys

To estimate the biomass of southern blue whiting (Micromesistius australis) using acoustic surveys.

- **We support this project's high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

SKI2009/01 Monitoring the length and age structure of commercial landings of gemfish in QMA 1

To determine the length and age structure of the commercial catch of gemfish (Rexea solandri) in QMA 1.

- **As discussed at the RCC, the consensus was that the cost recovery estimate would be \$25,000 - \$75,000. We believe that the stated high cost estimate band is a mistake which relates to the previous proposal which also included SKI 2.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The cost will likely be around \$75,000 where the split between the 2 cost bands lies.

OBS2009/xx Observer Services – Hoki and Middle depth fisheries

To collect specified data for hoki and middle depth fisheries research and to collect specified data describing the effects of fishing in hoki and middle depth fisheries.

- **As discussed at the RCC meeting, the optimisation of sampling for middle depth bycatch species needs to be done in order to avoid a piecemeal arbitrary approach and to ensure that coverage is representative of each fishery.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project and agrees that coverage of the fisheries needs to be reviewed and optimised where possible.

ROCK LOBSTER FISHERIES

CRA2009/01 Stock assessment of rock lobster

To conduct assessments of rock lobster (Jasus edwardsii) stocks including estimation of biomass and sustainable yields.

- **We support this project's high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

CRA2009-02 Rock lobster recruitment

To correlate trends in puerulus settlement with trends in abundance for selected rock lobster fisheries.

- **This project should proceed, with attention given to constraining costs by making as much use of industry participants as can be agreed between industry and the service provider.**
- **There is industry confidence that the settlement index might be a component of future management procedures for lobster fisheries. Whilst it is true that the settlement index has so far been of limited value in the stock assessment process, it has been of value elsewhere as a possible indicator of future trends in abundance, most recently in CRA 3 and in CRA 4. Settlement indices were a priority consideration for commercial rights holders contemplating significant voluntary catch reductions in those fisheries.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project

SHELLFISH FISHERIES

GLM2009/01 Green-lipped mussels in GLM 9

To determine the best method(s) for investigating population connectivity of the green-lipped mussel resource and associated algal species at Ninety Mile Beach and adjacent coastal areas (GLM 9).

- **Industry supports this proposal but note that it is a desktop study that should be at the low end of the cost estimate.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project and the comment concerning the cost.

OYS2009/01 Foveaux Strait oyster stock assessment

*To provide information on the status of the Foveaux Strait oyster (*Ostrea chilensis*) fishery and infection by *Bonamia exitosia*.*

- **We agree that this proposal has a very high priority however in consultation with the Bluff Oyster Management Company, we do not support the details of this project viz**
 - a. **we do not support this proposal being for a 3 year term and**

- submit that it should be tendered annually as in the past.
- b. specific objective 2 is not an action that needs to be undertaken annually.
 - c. in 2009/10 only a bonamia survey is required.
 - d. the cost estimate is far too high and the cost for one year only (2009/10) should be in the cost estimate band \$100,000-\$150,000.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project in general and the concerns about the details.

PPI2009/01 Stock assessment of Mair Bank pipis
*To carry out a stock assessment of pipis (*Paphies australis*) on Mair Bank Whangarei Harbour, including estimating absolute biomass and sustainable yields.*

- **We agree that this is a medium priority but believe there is a more pressing need to obtain recreational and customary catch levels.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for a medium priority for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2. Estimates of recreational and customary catch will be developed under other programmes.

SCA2009/03 Scallop growth
To investigate factors influencing scallop growth rates, and provide improved estimates of growth.

- **While this project may yield relevant management information, we cannot support its high priority status in the current environment.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns over the priority for this project.

SCA2009/06 Environment-recruit relationships for scallops
To investigate how environmental variations influence scallop population dynamics

- **While this project may yield relevant management information, we cannot support a priority status in the current environment.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns over the priority for this project.

SCA2009/07 Scallop medium term research plan
To prepare a medium term research plan (MTRP) that will identify the main research directions and needs for undertaking research on scallops over the next three to five years.

- **We recognise the need for this strategic plan to be developed but consider that it should be funded by the Ministry from other than the research budget.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's recognition of the need for a strategic plan and its suggestion that this should not be funded through the research budget. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SCI2009/01 Estimating the abundance of scampi in SCI 3
To estimate the abundance of scampi (Metanephrops challenger) in SCI 3.

- **We support this project but are concerned that the actual costs will exceed the estimates. If that is so, the project needs to be re-considered.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's qualitative support for this project, subject to the cost not exceeding the estimate.

SCI2009/02 Stock assessment of scampi
To undertake stock assessments of selected scampi stocks (Metanephrops challenger).(SCI 1 and SCI 2 and SCI 6A).

- **We note that patchy observer and growth data has hindered the scampi stock assessment. Until the outcome of the analyses proposed at the October workshop are available, this project should be deferred.**

MFish response

The Ministry agrees with SeaFIC's suggestion that patchy observer coverage and limited information on growth has hampered the development of stock assessments for scampi. Various approaches to stock assessment modelling are available and future directions will be determined after consideration of, inter alia, the outputs from the October workshop. The Ministry does not agree that the project should be deferred.

SCI2009/03 Estimating the abundance of scampi in SCI 4A

To estimate the abundance of scampi (Metanephrops challenger) in SCI 4A.

- **We agree with the RCC decision to give this proposal medium priority as a means to dropping this project for consideration in 2009/10.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for a medium priority for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SUR2009/01 Characterisation of kina fisheries

To characterise the kina fisheries in the major kina stocks.

- **We support the high priority assigned to this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. However, this project has been rated as Tier 2.

OBS2009/04 Research Observer Services –Scampi Fisheries

To collect specified data describing scampi fisheries and the effects of fishing in shellfish fisheries for shellfish fisheries research.

- **We note that there is a current project to use commercial grading data as an alternative to observer data.**
- **Observer coverage from scampi fisheries has yielded only patchy data and it is not clear that the proposed coverage is adequate or properly representative of the fishery.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on observer coverage for scampi and alternative ways of characterising catch at age for stock assessment models. Future observer coverage will be based on the outcome of the commercial grading project, the findings of the October scampi stock assessment workshop, the need for information on protected species and other bycatch, and the limits and constraints inherent in the observer programme.

DEEPWATER FISHERIES

OEO2009/01 Oreo stock assessment

To carry out a stock assessment of black oreo (Allocttus niger) and smooth oreo (Psuedocytus maculatus), including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.

- **While the Medium Term research plan supports a 3-5 year review of the oreo stocks, there are no new acoustic surveys results to update the assessment.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

OEO2009/02 Estimation of the abundance of black oreo and smooth oreo in selected areas

*To estimate the abundance of black oreo (*Allocyttus niger*) and smooth oreo (*Psuedocyttus maculatus*) in selected areas.*

- **We note that the technology to accurately distinguish between species in this survey is not well developed and consequently this is an expensive survey which may not provide adequate information for the management of these species. We consider that this project should be deferred for 1 year.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This is the largest smooth oreo fishery in New Zealand and regular surveys are needed to be able to monitor the status of the stock.

ORH2009/01 Orange roughy stock assessment

*To carry out a stock assessment of orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*), including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.*

- **We support the stock assessment being undertaken.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

ORH2009/02 Stock structure of orange roughy

To determine stock structure of orange roughy.

- **This project should be deferred pending the outcome of the workshop in 2009.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The timing of the project is such that the work will start later than any workshop.

ORH2009/04 Estimating the non-spawning proportion of mature orange roughy

- **Given the sensitivity of the assessment model to this factor, we support the high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

ORH2009-05 Estimating the abundance of orange roughy using acoustic methods

To resolve outstanding issues with the analysis and interpretation of orange roughy acoustic survey results by experimental work in the field and the re-analysis of earlier data

- **We support this project, but suggest that the field work be combined with other survey work to reduce costs.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. It is planned for this work to be carried out in association with other at-sea programmes. .

ORH2009/06 Stock assessment of orange roughy fisheries outside the New Zealand EEZ

*To monitor orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*) fisheries in the New Zealand region outside the EEZ.*

- **Given the nature of the stock, we support this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

ORH2009/07 Estimation of the abundance of orange roughy in selected areas
*To estimate the abundance of orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*) in selected areas.*

- **We suggest that the Ministry discuss this project with the Deepwater Working Group before it is tendered.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. We are sure that we will be discussing this project with the DWG.

ORH2009/07 Research Observer Services – Deepwater Fisheries
To collect specified data describing deepwater fisheries for deepwater fisheries research.

- **We believe that, since the programme has been long running and any new information will be of marginal benefit only, the programme should be scaled down .**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. Coverage of the fisheries needs to be reviewed and adjusted as appropriate.

NON COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

AKI2009/01 Shellfish monitoring in the Auckland Fisheries Management Area
To monitor shellfish populations on selected beaches in the Auckland Fisheries Management Area.

- **We provisionally support this proposal, but require a review of the design of the sampling, including an estimate of the statistical power of the surveys, must be presented to the working group before the project begins.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. A review of the design of the sampling is the first objective of this project with a subsequent SFWG presentation of any proposed new design before any survey is due to occur.

BCO2009/01 Relative abundance of blue cod between Otago Peninsula and the Catlins (BCO3)

To estimate relative abundance, maturity state, sex ratio, and age structure of blue cod (Paraperis colias) around Otago Peninsula and the Catlins.

- **In view of the sustainability concerns, we support the high priority status of this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

BCO2009/02 Relative abundance of blue cod in the Foveaux Strait (BCO 5)

To estimate relative abundance, maturity state, sex ratio, and age structure of blue cod (Paraperis colias) in the Foveaux Strait.

- **In view of the lack of sustainability and utilisation concerns, we do not support the high priority status of this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on the priority given to this project.

BCO2009/05 Angler monitoring of blue cod populations and release mortality rates and causes from the recreational fishery in the Marlborough Sounds.

To initiate a robust community lead monitoring programme for BCO in the Marlborough Sounds.

- **We support this project being a high priority, but note that this priority derives principally from a community relations perspective. We strongly urge the Ministry to ensure that any community monitoring receives appropriate scientific guidance, including help with formulating objectives and setting the design of any project. However, we have doubts as to the management value of the project in the current “no-take” environment.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s comments on this project.

COC2009/01 Whakapuaka cockle survey

To determine the distribution, density and size distribution of cockles within Whakapuaka Estuary, Delaware Bay (COC 7A) and investigate what factors influence the distribution and size structure.

- **We do not support this proposal as presented.**

MFish Response

This proposal was generated from customary consultations, and was 100% Crown funded. However given the many projects up for consideration and feedback from industry and ministry managers this project now looks unlikely to receive funding. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

EEL2009/01 Survey of tuna in customary areas of ANG 14

To assess the present status of eel populations in the areas of customary significance in ANG 14.

- **Given the status of tuna to customary fishers, we support this project proceeding with a high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s support for this project.

EEL2009/04 Assessment of the eel population in the Patea River catchment

- **Given the status of tuna to customary fishers, we support this project proceeding with a high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s support for this project.

KIN2009/01 Catch-at-age and CPUE of recreational charter catch of kingfish in KIN 1

*To monitor the status of kingfish (*Seriola lalandii*) stocks in KIN 1.*

- **We note that this proposal will be 100% Crown funded and that substantial changes to the project description were outlined at the RCC meeting. We support this proposal being assigned a high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

REC2009/01 **Recreational fishing survey design**

To estimate the recreational harvest of priority fish species in selected fisheries.

- **We agree that this research is a very high priority and suggest that the Recreational Working Group should become involved in all stages of this proposal.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project and agrees that the recreational WG be involved.

REC2009/02 Recreational fishing survey southern North Island west coast
To characterise the recreational fishery along the lower west coast of the North Island (between Tirua Point and Titahi Bay, FMA 8).

- **In view of the lack of sustainability and utilisation concerns, we do not support the high priority status of this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

REC2009/03 Survey of the Southland Recreational blue cod fishery
To characterise the recreational fishery for blue cod in Southland.

- **In view of the need to manage blue cod to avoid localised depletion, we support a high priority status for this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

REC2009/04 Recreational fishing effort indices
To monitor changes in recreational fishing effort in FMA's 1, 8, and 9.

- **In view of the absence of recreational catch information, we agree that this research is a very high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

REC2009/05 Survey of recreational fishers in the Marlborough Sounds with respect to post-closure regulations

To conduct the choice modelling and quantitative assessments of attitudes, motivations and perceptions of recreational fishers targeting blue cod in Marlborough Sounds.

- **We do not support this project.**
- **Although we consider that socio-economic research is important for making fisheries management decisions, and that the methodology proposed may be helpful, we consider that the fishery needs to be managed decisively, and the proposal as worded implies that the future management will be more like the “least bad” approach.**
- **There are indications that political, rather than management, considerations have influenced the project specifications.**
- **Obvious regulatory options that should be considered (but are not included in the proposal) are mandatory catch reporting and licensing.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SCA2009/01 Monitoring scallops in the Kaipara Harbour scallop 186A closure

To monitor scallops in Kaipara Harbour.

- **While we support the priority status of the project, we note its limited regional impact..**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

SNA2009/05 Incidental snapper mortality from the SNA 1 recreational fishery.

To estimate the incidental mortality of snapper released by fishers in SNA 1.

- **We do not support this project and would prefer to see more accurate estimates of recreational catch. Incidental mortality rates are an ancillary issue when the level of catch is effectively unknown.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The RCC noted that understanding all aspects of mortality are important when quantifying fishery impacts on a stock. However, this project has been rated as Tier 2.

TOH2009/01 Distribution and abundance of toheroa
*To determine the distribution of toheroa (*Paphies ventricosum*) beds, and the abundance and size structure of toheroa on select beaches according to the survey design from Objective 1.*

- **We agree that the research is a high priority but question why the cost estimate for this research is so expensive.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. The estimate for costs for this project is a) anticipated at the lower end of the cost bracket indicated and b) consistent with the cost of recently awarded similar tenders. The Ministry of Fisheries runs an open and competitive tender process which always welcomes quality bids at prices lower than anticipated.

INSHORE FINFISH FISHERIES

BCO2009/03 Monitoring the length, sex and age structure of commercial landings of blue cod in BCO 5
To determine the length, sex and age structure of the commercial catch of blue cod in BCO 5.

- **An analysis of the CPUE trend for this fishery has been recently completed by SEFM and will be presented to the Inshore Working Group in early 2009. SEFM has also contracted and funded a very similar project to determine the length, sex and age structure of the commercial catch of blue cod in BCO 5.**
- **We believe this project should be deferred pending the analyses of the SEFM projects.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The project will only be tendered pending the outcome of the Working Group meeting where the SEFM data is presented.

BCO2009/04 Catch per unit effort analysis of the commercial blue cod fishery in BCO 4
To characterise the BCO 4 fishery and to analyse trends in CPUE of the BCO 4 stock

- **Since there are no sustainability or utilisation management issues**

reported, we believe this project should not proceed..

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project.

BNS2009/01 Age composition of commercial catch of bluenose in BNS 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8

*To determine the stock status of bluenose (*Hyperoglyphe antarctica*) by investigating the spatial and temporal age structure of the New Zealand bluenose commercial catches.*

- **We support this project being a high priority but note that it is contingent on the outcome of BNS2008/01. If BNS2008/01 cannot be completed before the approval process for research projects, this project should be deferred.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project will only be tendered pending the outcome of BNS2008-01.

ELE2009/01 Fishery characterisation and CPUE analysis of ELE 7
*To characterise the elephantfish (*Callorhinchus milii*) fishery in ELE 7*

- **We agree with this proposal being given a medium priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's agreement that this project should be medium priority. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

EMA2009/01 Stock assessment of EMA 1
To conduct a stock assessment for the EMA 1 including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.

- **We note that the tender of this proposal depends on the outcome of the review of the aerial sightings index in November 2008. We suggest that this project should be deferred until the abundance index is available.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project will only be tendered pending the outcome of the aerial sightings index review. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

FLA2009/01 Assess the feasibility of using juvenile netting surveys to predict adult yellow-belly and sand flounder abundance in the Manukau Harbour and Firth of Thames

To determine the utility of pre-recruit netting surveys for predicting adult flounder abundance in FLA 1 harbours and estuaries.

- **We note that the objectives were to be rewritten based on the discussion at the RCC meeting, and this has not yet been done. We support this proposal as it may provide an alternative option for the management of flatfish.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. The omissions in the objectives will be corrected prior to going to tender. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

GMU2009/01 Spatial Mixing of GMU 1 using otolith microchemistry
*To identify grey mullet (*Mugil cephalus*) nursery areas using otolith microchemistry.*

- **In the absence of recognised sustainability or utilisation issues and the low economic value of the fishery, we cannot support this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. Sstock structure is an important issue that needs to be resolved for effective management of this stock. This project is a less expensive means of addressing this issue than tagging. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

GMU2009/02 Monitoring the length and age structure of commercial landings of grey mullet in GMU 1
To determine the length, age, sex and maturity structure of the commercial catch of grey mullet in GMU 1.

- **In the absence of recognised sustainability or utilisation issues and the low economic value of the fishery, we cannot support this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project.

GUR2009/01 Fishery characterisation and CPUE analysis of GUR 1
*To characterise the red gurnard (*Chelidonichthys kumu*) fishery and undertake a CPUE analysis in GUR 1.*

- **In the absence of recognised sustainability or utilisation issues, we cannot support this project having a higher priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project.

HPB2009/01 Spawning locations of hapuku migrating in Cook Strait
Identify hapuku spawning locations, movement routes, and spawning habitat in Cook Strait to inform analysis of stock structure

- **We submit that this proposal should be deferred until the objectives are specified more clearly.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

INS2009/01 National stock relationships: Part 2 – tarakihi and red gurnard
To determine rates of exchange/movement of tarakihi (Nemadactylus macropterus), and red gurnard (Chelidonichthys kumu) between FMA's throughout New Zealand.

- **In the absence of recognised sustainability or utilisation issues, we cannot support this project having a high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. There is a need to undertake stock structure work so that the appropriateness of stock boundaries can be defined for stock assessment purposes This project has been rated as Tier 2.

INS2009/03 Characterisation of FMA 2 fisheries
To characterise the inshore fisheries in FMA 2 and identify abundance indices for the key species.

- **We support the high priority of this project and recommend there be more discussion and involvement of industry in the project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project and the comment concerning industry involvement.

INT2009/01 Trawl survey for FMA's 1 and 9
To estimate the relative abundance of red gurnard, John dory and tarakihi in FMA's 1, 8 and 9.

- **We support this survey but note its progression will depend on budget considerations.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

JDO2009/02 Catch-at-age and of JDO 1

To analyse catch-at-age for the commercial catch of John Dory (Zeus faber) in JDO 1.

- **We support this being high priority and consider that the cost estimate is correct – we do not believe that this project warrants costs above its upper cost estimate of \$75,000.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

JDO2009/03 Feasibility of using the Danish seine catch to monitor John dory in JDO 1

To assess the feasibility of using Danish seine catch to monitor the John Dory fishery in JDO 1.

- **We do not support this project as we consider this approach unlikely to be successful.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. In the absence of any other means to assess this fishery and the fact that it is now a target fishery the Ministry believes that this is a potential means to monitor the stock.

JMA2009/01 Catch-at-age and catch composition of jack mackerel fisheries in JMA 1

*To determine the seasonality and species composition of the commercial catches of *Trachurus declivis*, *T. murphyi*, and *T. novaezelandiae* in JMA 1.*

- **We support the high priority status of this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

KAH2009/01 To quantify the level of stock mixing within KAH 1 using tagging
To quantify the stock structure and level of mixing between kahawai in subareas within KAH 1.

- **We do not support the use of tags in a research project without a commitment to quantitatively recover the tags. This component would add significant cost to this project but it is unlikely to achieve**

its objectives unless such provision is made.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

LEA2009/01 Characterisation and monitoring LEA 1 and 2
To characterise and monitor the New Zealand leatherjacket (Parika scaber) fisheries in LEA 1 and LEA 2.

- **Support but believe this project should be included in the proposal "INS2009/03 Characterisation of FMA 2 fisheries".**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. We note that leatherjacket was excluded from INS2009-03 at the request of the Area 2 industry representative as LEA 2 has boundaries that are inconsistent with the other species included in INS2009-03. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

MOK2009/01 Catch-at-age of the commercial landings of blue moki in MOK 1 and MOK 3
To analyse catch-at-age for the commercial catch of blue moki (Latridopsis ciliaris) in MOK 1 and MOK 3.

- **We do not support this research at this time and consider this to be of medium priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry agrees with SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SCH2009/01 Catch-at-length of the commercial landings of school shark in SCH 1 and 2
To analyse catch-at-length and age for the commercial catch of school shark (Galeorhinus galeus) in SCH 1 and 2.

- **We do not support this research at this time and consider this to be of medium priority. We suggest due to budget constraints that this proposal is deferred for one year.**

MFish response

The Ministry agrees with SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SNA2009/01 Stock assessment for SNA 2

*To conduct a stock assessment for snapper (*Pagrus auratus*) in SNA 2, including estimating biomass and sustainable yields.*

- **Without credible biomass estimates for this Fishstock, it is unlikely that a traditional age-structured assessment model will be very informative. Alternative methodologies could be used to undertake the analysis and note the comments made at the RCC that a cost estimate band of \$25,000 to \$75,000 was more realistic.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project.

SNA2009/02 Catch-at-age of snapper in SNA 7
*To determine the catch-at-age of snapper (*Pagrus auratus*), and develop abundance trends for SNA 7.*

- **Support. This is a high priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

SNA2009/03 Identification of major SNA 1 nursery areas and the quantification of their relative contribution to SNA 1 annual recruitment
To identify major nursery areas within SNA 1 using otolith microchemistry

- **Given the value of this stock to recreational, customary and commercial fishers, we support this project's high priority status.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

SNA2009/04 SNA 8 Sub-QMA distribution and abundance
To determine sub-QMA distribution and abundance of snapper in the North Taranaki area.

- **This is in our opinion a medium priority and we consider that this should be 100% Crown funded.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

SPD2009/01 Characterisation of the Northern spiny dogfish (*Squalus griffini*) fishery in FMA 1
To characterise the Northern spiny dogfish fishery in FMA 1.

- **Given the low economic value of this stock, we agree that this proposal is of a medium priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

TAR2009/01 Catch-at-age and catch composition of TAR 2
To determine the catch-at-age for the TAR 2 commercial catch.

- **While we support the need for this project, we consider it should be undertaken as part of an extended FMA2 characterisation..**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's comments on this project. This is a catch-at-age project and the INS2009-03 is a characterisation so would probably be undertaken by different service providers. Furthermore the characterisation involved for this project is to assess how best to sample it and is not a full characterisation of the fishery that will be delivered by INS2009-03. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

TAR2009/02 Catch-at-age and catch composition of TAR 3
To determine the catch-at-age for the TAR 3 commercial catch.

- **We support this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

TRE2009/02 Monitoring the length and age structure of commercial landings of trevally in TRE 7

To determine the length and age structure of the commercial catch trevally in TRE 7.

- **We support this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT

PRO2009/01 Abundance, distribution, and productivity of Hector's (and Maui's) dolphins

To estimate critical aspects of the biology, abundance and distribution of Hector's and Maui's dolphin populations to assess the effects of fishing-related mortality on these populations.

- **We strongly support the need for basic population research on Hector's and Maui's dolphins, but consider that the proposal requires further work. The project takes a "catch all" approach to dolphin research without (apparently) properly considering the relative priority associated with abundance, distribution and survival estimates or the needs of the different populations.**
- **We consider that, despite the recent Threat Management Plan process, a clear and strategic research plan for Hector's and Maui's dolphins is lacking. In that context, we suggest that the development of an ongoing series of abundance estimates must have highest priority (after estimates of bycatch, which are outside the scope of this project).**
- **As indicated in our introductory comments, we consider that the Department of Conservation should be undertaking this work. At the very least, coordination and planning of work undertaken by the two agencies is required.**
- **Discussion at the RCC indicated that officials had little confidence in the ability of the Ministry to fund this project within their current appropriation. We note the Minister of Fisheries' comment that "as critical as ongoing observer coverage, is a research programme to monitor the dolphin populations. ... I have asked the Chief Executive of the Ministry to bear this in mind when considering research priorities"¹. We are of the opinion that given the importance of this project, it must be carried out within the existing appropriation.**
- **Given the importance of the project, it is critical that this research project is undertaken by a party who has the absolute confidence of all parties interested in Maui and Hector dolphins.**
- **Given the population nature of this research, as against a mitigation focus, we insist that this project is 100% Crown funded.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project, especially for abundance surveys, and agrees that a coordinated approach with other research streams is required. The Ministry's Science Group is liaising closely with the Department of Conservation to ensure that this happens. The Cost Recovery Rules (2001) are clear that "research relating to protected species populations" is subject to cost recovery. Because risk from all human interventions has not been estimated, 50% cost recovery is appropriate, as defined in Schedule Item 3 of the Rules. The Ministry recognizes that the Cost Recovery Rules or Principles may change in the

¹ http://www.fish.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/E4A595B5-9FF7-4543-B341-B6DCCFE05D56/0/Ministers_decision_letter.pdf, para. 73.

future. In the meantime, the Ministry will continue to operate under the principles laid out in the Fisheries Act and the current regulated rules.

The Ministry runs open and transparent tendering processes to select research providers for research projects. The criteria against which tenders are assessed include the track record of the proposed team and organisation as well as the rigour of the proposed science. However, it is quite unrealistic to expect that any research provider would have the “absolute confidence of all parties interested in Muai (sic.) and Hector (sic.) dolphins”.

PRO2009/02 Survival of sea lions escaping from SLEDs
To estimate the likely survival rate of sea lions exiting trawls via Sea Lion Exclusion Devices (SLEDs) in the SQUIT and 6T squid fisheries.

- **Although we agree that definitive estimates of the survival of sea lions escaping SLEDs are highly desirable, we note that there is already a process in place to address this issue. We do not see this project as appropriate unless it was to arise from the processes of the SLED Technical Working Group.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s support for the aims of this project, and for its preference that the work arises from the SLED-TWG. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

PRO2009/04 Development and efficacy of seabird mitigation measures
To test the efficacy of a variety of configurations of mitigation techniques at reducing seabird mortality (or appropriate proxies for mortality) in longline fisheries

- **We support this project but require there to be some involvement of the Seabird Mitigation Technical Advisory Group.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s support for this project and agrees that it would be extremely helpful for the Seabird Mitigation Technical Advisory Group to be involved. This was always the Ministry’s intention.

PRO2009/05 Abundance and distribution of New Zealand fur seals on the west coast of the South Island
To assess the abundance and distribution of New Zealand fur seals on the West Coast of the South Island.

- **We understand that the high/medium priority ranking derives primarily from the need to address MSC certification issues.**
- **Providing fur seal population estimates should be the role of the**

Department of Conservation. However, as noted below (PRO2009/06) DoC have failed to provide such estimates despite a long-running research programme.

- We note that this project will not proceed if the required information is obtained through research contracted by the Deepwater Group. We note too that the Deepwater Group are content to have this project proceed on that basis.
- We consider that the choice of words in the first sentence of this project's rationale is poor. This states that "*New Zealand fur seals are not considered as threatened as New Zealand sea lions or Hector's dolphins*". In fact, NZ fur seals are simply not considered threatened. They are not listed in DoC's threat classification, and are listed by the IUCN as a species of "least concern".

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project proceeding with a medium-high priority and contingent on DWG's work. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

PRO2009/06 Review available information on the population parameters for the WCSI populations of the New Zealand fur seal

To review the available information on the population parameters of the WCSI populations of the New Zealand fur seals

- This project has been a core piece of Department of Conservation research for some years now and should remain so.
- We note the last sentence of the project proposal states:
"Because the overall fur seal population appears to be increasing, this research is a moderate priority compared with other protected species work."
- We agree that a high priority ranking is difficult to justify. Nevertheless, we note that there is considerable interest in reviewing what data may be available from DoC's research programme. We understand that DoC has contracted NIWA to advise on this work, and therefore encourage MFish to arrange a presentation of this work to the AEWG in order that future research planning can be suitably informed.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for work on WCSI fur seals and its suggestion that DOC should continue its long-standing study (this should be advised directly to DOC, the Ministry will not act as a conduit). The Ministry also notes the widespread interest in the work carried out to date and will indeed endeavour to have that work presented and discussed at the AEWG.

OBS2009 Research Observer Services to estimate the effects of New Zealand fisheries on protected species, biodiversity and habitats of significance

To collect data describing effects of fishing on protected species, biodiversity or habitats of significance

- **We note that this proposal was incomplete at the time of the RCC, and that the “post RCC” proposal still states “a revised project description will be available shortly after the RCC”.**
- **SeaFIC agrees that observer coverage to assess the nature and extent of protected species interactions with fisheries will require specifically planned observer coverage and, in general, we would favour a rotational approach to such coverage.**
- **Until a complete project proposal is supplied, we are unable to offer further comment. However, we agree that it is critical for MFish and CSP to provide a co-ordinated plan for protected species observer coverage. We note that it is the intention of Mfish to apply \$2 million of the new initiative funding to recruit new observers to undertake this work. We do not consider it appropriate for the ministry to continue with that intention. We would favour using some of the funding to replace existing baseline observer funding and free funds for research, such as the Hector and Maui dolphin project PRO2009/01.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s comments on observer coverage and the draft project. The Ministry is working closely with DOC to develop a more coordinated and complementary coverage plan and recently circulated a revised observer project for aquatic environment issues (predominantly protected species interactions) to members of the AEWG.

ENV2009/02 Bycatch and discards in oreo and orange roughy trawl fisheries

To estimate the level of non-target fish catch and discards of target and non-target fish species in selected New Zealand fisheries.

- **Support but believe that the research should be at the lower end of the cost recovery estimate (\$25,000).**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC’s support for this project and expects the cost to be towards the lower end of the range provided. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

ENV2009/09 Reducing bycatch in scampi fisheries

To develop methods to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects of the scampi fishery.

- **We support the medium priority ranking assigned at the RCC but believe this proposal should not proceed in 2009/10.**

- **Any future proposal of this nature should have much clearer management objectives.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for a medium priority for this project and its request for clearer links to management objectives. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

IDG2009/01 Finfish field identification guide: Part 2
To produce a field guide for fish species in New Zealand

- **We support the continuation of this project.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project.

BEN2009/02 Monitoring change in benthic communities in Spirits Bay
To monitor changes in the benthic invertebrate communities in Spirits Bay following closure of an area to bottom trawling and dredging.

- **SeaFIC does not agree that the monitoring programme designed in ENV2005/23 provides a suitable means of distinguishing the effects of fishing (and the results of closing some areas to fishing) from other effects on the benthic community.**
- **As the risk of the adverse effects of fishing to the unique benthic habitats of Spirits Bay have been removed by closing the area to bottom fishing, we do not consider that this research can be legitimately cost recovered.**
- **Further we do not consider it appropriate that cost recovery of the project should be a "fall back" position if the project is not funded by the new initiative bid.**
- **Given our concerns about the ability of the proposed monitoring to distinguish the effects of fishing from other effects, we think it unlikely that this project would be appropriate for a new initiative programme to improve information on the effects of bottom trawling and wider effects of fishing.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns over this project and its suitability for the new initiative programme to improve information on the effects of bottom trawling and wider effects of fishing. The Ministry believes there is a need to monitor changes in the benthic communities in the area closed to trawling and dredging, and that this information has great potential to increase our understanding of recovery rates despite some potential confounding factors. The combination of spatial and temporal analyses proposed in this project will be much more powerful than the existing spatial information.

BEN2009/04 Spatial overlap of scallop dredging and benthic habitat
To assess the spatial overlap of scallop dredging and benthic habitats in the Northland and Coromandel scallop fisheries.

- **We consider this to be a medium priority, primarily because neither the scientific or management objectives are well defined.**
- **The rationale for objective 1 notes that a preliminary benthic classification was carried out in ZBD2005/15, and that a new classification will also result from BEN2006/01A. It is not clear why neither of these is considered adequate for management, necessitating a further habitat classification.**
- **A risk based approach to assessing the impact of dredging on various habitats is likely appropriate. However, objective 2 makes particular mention of impacts of scallop fishing on horse mussels. Given that horse mussels were introduced into the QMS in 2004, catch-effort data should be the first data source for assessing the extent to which these are a bycatch of the scallop fishery.**
- **This is a relatively expensive project. Part of the prioritisation process should consider the total proposed research levy burden of this and other proposed research. We agree that this may be an appropriate project for the new initiative programme on the effects of fishing.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's concerns over this project and the possibly levy burden, and also the support for this as a project the new initiative programme to improve information on the effects of bottom trawling and wider effects of fishing. The preliminary benthic classification conducted in ZBD2005/15 covered only the Coromandel fishery, whereas the new benthic-optimised classification from BEN2006/01A will cover the entire TS&EEZ. The latter classification will be a suitable basis for conducting this study, but it will need to be merged with information on the locations of fishing to estimate overlap. This is essentially a risk-based approach as suggested by SeaFIC, but is based on broad habitat classes rather than simple bycatch.

The Ministry considers the potential levy burden when planning its research portfolio. Given the current approach to cost recovery, it is inevitable that the burden for individual stocks will fluctuate.

BEN2009/05 Dredging methods and impacts to shellfish beds
Further review of dredging technologies and practice for application in New Zealand.

- **We agree this is of medium priority.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for a medium priority for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

ENV2009/04 Trends in relative mesopelagic biomass using time series of acoustic backscatter data from trawl surveys

To determine variability in the relative biomass and species composition of the mesopelagic fish community in relation to commercial fishstock abundance and distribution, and to climatic and oceanographic variables.

- **While we support the nature of the research, we cannot support it proceeding at this time.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for the nature of the research in this project and its suggestion for a relatively low priority.

ENV2009/08 Status of the New Zealand ocean environment: update 2009
To summarise trends in climatic and oceanographic conditions that may affect ocean productivity, fish distribution and fish abundance in New Zealand.

- **The overview of oceanographic and climate indices provided by ENV2007/04 provided useful background information for fisheries scientists, but is unlikely to be useful on a very frequent basis. A five year update would seem appropriate. We therefore suggest the project be deferred.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's general support for research of this nature and its suggestion that updates need not be more frequent than every 5 years.

ENV2009/06 Habitats of particular significance for fisheries management: Southern Finfish.

To obtain a better understanding of the spatial distribution of important juvenile or reproductive (spawning, pupping or egg-laying) areas for key target species (flatfish, tarakihi and small sharks) of the Southern Inshore Finfish fishery.

- **Support.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's support for this project. This project has been rated as Tier 2.

ENV2009/07 Habitats of particular significance for fisheries management: Kaipara Harbour

To identify and map areas and habitats of particular significance in the Kaipara Harbour that support fisheries, and assess potential fishing and land-based threats to their function.

- **While we support the nature and objectives of this project, we are**

unsure as to whether it merits proceeding in 2009/10.

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's general support for research on the distribution of habitats of particular significance for fisheries management.

ENV2009/08 Adverse effects of soft plastic baits

To assess any adverse effects of soft plastic baits used by recreational fishers.

- **We support research in this area, but agree with the lower priority ranking given. As per the discussion at the RCC we agree that this would be a good candidate project to address through student research projects with some MFish support.**

MFish response

The Ministry notes SeaFIC's general support for research of this nature and is exploring different approaches to funding the work outside of this process. This project has been rated as Tier 2.