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Dear Fishery Stakeholder

### **2008 IN-SEASON TAC REVIEW FOR THE COROMANDEL SCALLOP FISHERY**

This letter outlines the reasons for my final decisions on the total allowable catch (TAC) for the Coromandel scallop fishery for the 2008–09 fishing year. The Coromandel scallop fishery (SCACS) occupies the area from Cape Rodney in the Hauraki Gulf to Town Point in the Bay of Plenty.

Using information from a research survey conducted in May this year, I have decided to increase the TAC for the Coromandel scallop fishery from 48 tonnes meatweight to 148 tonnes meatweight. The increase took effect from 4 August 2008.

The TAC increase has been allocated as follows:

- the allowance for recreational fishing is increased from 7.5 to 10 tonnes meatweight;
- the allowance for customary Maori fishing is increased from 7.5 to 10 tonnes meatweight;
- the allowance for other sources of fishing-related mortality is increased from 11 to 33 tonnes meatweight; and
- the annual catch entitlement (ACE) for quota owners is increased from 22 to 95 tonnes meatweight.

On 31 March 2009, the TAC will revert to 48 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for recreational fishing will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for customary fishing will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight, the allowance for other sources of fishing-related mortality will revert to 11 tonnes meatweight, and the ACE will revert to 22 tonnes meatweight.

The change to the TAC was notified in the *Gazette* on 1 August, and comes into effect the following working day. This means that additional ACE will be available to quota owners from 4 August. The commercial fishing season for the Coromandel scallop fishery begins on 15 July and closes on 21 December each year. The recreational scallop fishing season in the Auckland area, which includes SCACS, has changed, and now opens on 1 September and closes on 31 March each year.



In reaching my final decisions for the 2008 season, I have carefully considered the available fishery assessment information, advice from the Ministry of Fisheries, and the issues and information put forward by sector groups in submissions. I have also had regard to the legislative provisions of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act), especially the sections relating to the purpose of the Act, the environmental and information principles, and the setting and amending of sustainability measures. In addition, I have had particular regard to sections 7 and 8 of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000. These sections pertain to the national significance of the Hauraki Gulf; to the social, economic, recreational and cultural wellbeing of the people of the Gulf; and to the special management requirements of the Gulf.

The Act imposes an obligation to provide for the utilisation of fisheries resources as long as sustainability is ensured. The Coromandel scallop fishery is listed on the Second Schedule of the Act, which enables an in-season increase to the TAC when this can be shown to be sustainable. The research survey that was conducted in May indicates that additional sustainable yield will be available from the fishery for the remainder of the 2008–09 fishing year. While the research survey has shown a decrease in the biomass of the Coromandel scallop fishery compared with last year, it still remains high by recent historical standards and the increase I have approved is well within sustainable limits.

It is pleasing to see quota owners have again taken a precautionary approach by proposing a cautious harvest level for the 2008–09 fishing year. I also congratulate the commercial sector on their decision to stop fishing last year in order to avoid damaging the unusually large number of undersized scallops present at the time. I am pleased to see that this cohort of juvenile scallops was present in this year's biomass survey and will hopefully recruit to the fishery during the season. This is an excellent example of commercial fishers taking responsible action for the long-term benefit of the fishery.

In deciding on an appropriate increase to the TAC, I was careful to note that estimated yield was calculated as a proportion of the biomass estimate. As such, the yield estimate has already accounted for the reduction in surveyed biomass between 2007 and 2008. While several recreational sector submitters argued that the proposed ACE increase was too large, I feel that 95 tonnes represents a very cautious harvest level, especially when compared to an estimated yield of 276 tonnes. I saw no reason for a greater level of caution than that proposed by the commercial sector this year.

Opinion was varied amongst submitters regarding the increase in the non-commercial allowances. In my view, it is probable that recreational catch will again exceed baseline levels this year, given the relatively high biomass at the stock level and recent changes to the recreational regulations which have improved recreational access to the fishery. I note that the research survey results relate primarily to the scallop beds mainly fished by the commercial sector. However, I believe it is reasonable to assume that trends in scallop abundance in the non-commercial scallop beds are likely to be similar to abundance trends for the surveyed beds. I do, however, understand that there is some uncertainty here, so I look forward to the results of research currently underway to establish a relationship between the non-commercial beds and the beds normally included in the pre-season biomass survey.

I believe the most realistic scenario is that the recreational catch will be at a similar level to last year's season. Therefore, the recreational allowance will be increased from the 'baseline' level of 7.5 to 10 tonnes meatweight. I feel that the ongoing development of a fishery plan in the Coromandel scallop fishery is the best place to address issues of changes to the baseline allowances, or exploring the establishment of further areas closed to commercial fishing. I look forward to the results of ongoing research estimating recreational scallop harvest from the Whitianga area, and hope that this information can be used to inform allowances in this fishery in the future.

There is no quantitative information available on the overall tonnage of Coromandel scallops taken by Maori customary fishers. Therefore, the Maori customary allowance will also be increased from 7.5 to 10 tonnes meatweight. Both non-commercial allowances will revert to 7.5 tonnes meatweight at the end of the current fishing year for the Coromandel scallop fishery (31 March 2009).

In 2005, I decided to not increase the daily bag limit from 20 to 30 scallops per fisher because of the lack of quantitative information to support such a decision. I note that the recreational sector has decided not to seek this increase this year, but might do so in 2009. I look forward to information on the recreational beds and recreational harvest in the Coromandel fishery becoming available in the near future and hearing how this issue is considered in the ongoing fishery plan development for SCACS.

I thank you for your interest in the management of the Coromandel scallop fishery. It is good to see the fishery remains healthy, and that all stakeholders are able to enjoy such an important shared fishery.

Yours sincerely



Jim Anderton  
**Minister of Fisheries**