

## ***Milford & Doubtful Sounds – proposal to extend the Blue Cod amateur fishery closures***

69 Milford and Doubtful Sounds (Figure 1), which lie within the Fiordland Marine Area, have been closed to amateur fishing for blue cod (*Parapercis colias*) since 30 June 2005. The closures resulted from the concerns of the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) about localised depletion due to fishing pressure.

70 The Guardians have recommended to MFish that the existing four year closures of Milford and Doubtful Sounds to amateur blue cod fishing be extended for a further period of one year, to the 29 June 2010. They are currently due to end on 29 June 2009.

71 Blue cod stocks in the closed areas have been monitored during the existing closures and, at the date of writing, four summers' data have been collected. The results of the monitoring do not show any clear trend in blue cod abundance over the course of the closures. No baseline data are available for either area immediately prior to the closures, and it may be too soon for any improvement in abundance to have occurred.

72 Data from the marine reserve (Piopiotahi) in Milford Sound indicate that fish may be larger and more abundant there than the (more recently closed) remainder of Milford Sound. No rigorous statistical analysis has been done to confirm this as there is not yet enough data. But, the data suggest that improvement in blue cod abundance is possible.

73 The Guardians' recommendation to extend the closures will enable a further year's data to be collected. They hope that this will lead to a better understanding of the blue cod stocks in Milford and Doubtful Sounds and, consequently, better informed management decisions. An extension of one year would also coincide with the review scheduled for 2010 to determine the effectiveness of the overall management of the Fiordland Marine Area.

74 MFish's initial position is to support extending the closures, but without specifying an end date. MFish considers that for any recovery of blue cod stocks to occur, it is likely to require a longer closure than the Guardians have recommended, but how long is unknown. An open ended closure allows for the areas to be reopened in the future when monitoring results shows the stocks have either recovered sufficiently or will not improve further.

75 MFish seeks stakeholders' views on whether to extend the closures, and if so, for how long.