

“Voluntary” rāhui on scallop gathering at Opito Bay

By Stephan Bosman

Many Opito Bay residents gathered on Thursday morning last week in support of Joe Davis, rangatira of Ngāti Hei, placing a “voluntary” rāhui on the gathering of scallops in the Opito Bay area.

The rāhui is the direct result of a large group of Coromandel residents being concerned about the noticeable decline of scallop numbers on the eastern side of the Peninsula. According to the Opito Bay Ratepayers Association, this is likely due to years of unconstrained harvest and destructive dredging, which decimates scallops and crabs, crustaceans, and other shellfish and sea life that inhabit the seafloor.

The Opito Bay residents have tried to engage with Fisheries New Zealand over their concerns for several years, without success.

The rāhui will be taking the form of a campaign discouraging Opito Bay ratepayers and visitors to harvest scallops. Ngāti Hei has undertaken to not issue permits for the customary gathering of scallops in the Opito Bay area while the rāhui is in force.

Also on Thursday, at the same time the rāhui was put in place, Dive Zone Whitianga started a survey of the scallop population in Opito Bay.

In welcoming everyone on Thursday, Paul Cook, representing the Opito Bay Ratepayers Association, said they are a small community and the rāhui is a small first step in a much longer journey. “We hope other Coromandel communities will follow our lead and discourage their residents and visitors to take scallops from the ocean,” he said.

Joe Davis said Ngāti Hei have been aware of the depletion of scallop stocks for a long time. “We haven’t had scallops wash up onto Kuaotunu Beach in over 10 years, so we are pleased the Opito Bay community is willing to contribute to their restoration by surveying scallop numbers and supporting a rāhui,” he said. “Crayfish and mussels are also depleted. Action needs to be taken now so that our mokopuna and all of us will have kai moana to enjoy into the future.”

Trish Rea, communications lead of LegaSea, the public awareness arm of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, was also present on Thursday. She said Dive Zone will attempt to survey scallop stocks at 50 sites over the next month. The results will be analysed by a marine scientist from Te Ohomai Institute of Technology in Tauranga and will be used to lobby the government to better manage the scallop fishery. This could include a ban on harvesting for a period long enough to give

stocks the opportunity to replenish. “However, before we even get to the point of formal intervention by the government, we hope other communities as well as the commercial scallop fishers will come on board and we can all work together to ensure a future with an abundance of scallops and other seafood for all of us to enjoy,” she said.

Dirk Sieling, a Mercury Bay member of the stakeholder working group that developed the Tai Timu Tai Pari Sea Change Hauraki



Some of those present when a voluntary rāhui was placed on the gathering of scallops in the Opito Bay area on Thursday last week. From the left - Joe Davis of Ngāti Hei, Dirk Sieling (a member of the stakeholder working group that developed the Tai Timu Tai Pari Sea Change Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan in 2016), Paul Cook of the Opito Bay Ratepayers Association and Trish Rea of LegaSea.



“Voluntary” scallop rāhui

Gulf Marine Spatial Plan in 2016, expressed his pleasure with the rāhui on Thursday. “Sea Change was developed around the concept of ahu moana,” he said. “It’s about mana whenua and local communities making decisions about their own coastal space. What we see here today is an example of how that should work in practice, Ngāti Hei and the Opito Bay community joining forces to ensure a better outcome for all of us.”

A recent online survey found over 90 percent of Opito Bay ratepayers supported an immediate voluntary ban on taking scallops from Opito Bay and surrounding waters. The Opito Bay Ratepayers Association has already raised over \$25,000 to contribute to the costs of making people aware of the rāhui and the Dive Zone survey.

Earlier this month, a letter outlining the Opito Bay community’s concerns was sent to David Parker, the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries. In addition to Ngāti Hei, the Opito Bay Ratepayers Association, LegaSea and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, the letter was also signed by the Mercury Bay Game Fishing Club, the Tairua-Pauanui Sports Fishing Club, the Whangamata Ocean Sports Club, the New Zealand Underwater Association and Spearfishing New Zealand.

“We advised the Minister that we have watched the scallop beds in Opito Bay diminish in size and abundance over the years,” Chris Severne, chair of the Opito Bay Ratepayers Association, said at the time

the letter was sent. “But we’re not alone, the scallop beds in the surrounding area are also depleted so those fishers are now heading into Opito Bay looking for any remnants. This is not sustainable.”

Earlier this year, in a proactive move, the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council endorsed a policy encouraging recreational fishers to dive for scallops and not scallop dredge. At the time, New Zealand Sport Fishing Council president, Bob Gutsell, said, “Our community is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating state of inshore waters. We know seafloor organisms are crucial to the overall health of the marine environment, so it’s exciting to see our members embracing progressive policy and encouraging change.”

LegaSea is concerned that unconstrained commercial scallop fishing combined with the ongoing use of the Victorian Box Dredge as the harvest method of choice has altered the state of the seafloor. “Commercial catch limits have remained high while actual harvest declines,” Sam Woolford, LegaSea programme lead, said a few weeks ago. “This is a failure of the quota management system. Mismanagement of scallops has seen the commercial fleet dwindle from a peak of 23 boats, down to four this [commercial scallop] season. This is clearly not economically or environmentally sustainable. We hope commercial interests will see the value in a conservative approach and join the community in giving the scallops a break over this summer.”



24 HR GYM
QUALIFIED PERSONAL TRAINERS
GROUP FITNESS
CAFE AND SMOOTHIE BAR
CHILD MINDING AVAILABLE



BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU
KICKBOXING
MIXED MARTIAL ARTS
KIDS AND ADULTS CLASSES
PRIVATE LESSONS AVAILABLE



3/9 Joan Gaskell Dr

Whitianga 3510

@evolutionfitnesswhitianga

P. 07 866 4301

E. evolutionfit247@gmail.com

W. evolutionfitness.co.nz

MORTGAGE & INSURANCE ADVISERS

