



19th November 2021

Hon David Parker
Minister of Oceans and Fisheries
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Minister,

Phase out mobile bottom contact fishing methods from the entire Hauraki Gulf Marine Park through the Hauraki Gulf Fish Plan and Advisory Group

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC), LegaSea, the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society (Forest & Bird), Greenpeace Aotearoa, WWF-NZ, Environmental Defence Society (EDS), the Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand (ECO), NZ Angling & Casting Association and the New Zealand Underwater Association (NZUA) request that you direct Fisheries New Zealand to include a time bound objective in the Hauraki Gulf Fish Plan to phase out all mobile bottom contact fishing methods from the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (HGMP) by 2024.

We are providing you with this request in advance of a public call to regulate and phase out these mobile benthic contact fishing methods within the HGMP. Public support will be strong as shown in a new Horizon Research poll released earlier today by the Hauraki Gulf Forum, that reports **84% of New Zealanders** living within the vicinity of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park *'support banning fishing methods that impact on the seafloor (such as dredging and trawling) from the entire Gulf'*.

It is clear from the latest [State of the Gulf 2020 report](#) that the Hauraki Gulf ecosystem is under enormous pressure, and is in a far worse state now than it was 20 years ago when the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park was established. There are widespread kina barrens, significant loss and degradation of benthic habitats, overfishing is occurring, such as tarakihi & crayfish, and some shellfish stocks have collapsed.

Cumulative and land-based effects such as sedimentation and nutrients are also significantly affecting the health and recovery of the Hauraki Gulf. There is a clear need for action and the Government's response in June to the Sea Change - Tai Timu Tai Park, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan, the Revitalising the Gulf Strategy is a start. The Strategy focused on two areas - fisheries management and marine protection. Fisheries management outcomes will be primarily achieved through the establishment of a Hauraki Gulf Fish Plan (HGFP).

This HGFP presents a unique opportunity to not only manage the Hauraki Gulf at a more meaningful spatial scale of the Park boundary, but an opportunity to apply Section 11 of the Fisheries Act and remove fishing methods that destroy benthic habitats.

We welcome the intent of the Government's Strategy to increase abundance and biodiversity within the HGMP and to reverse the decades of degradation. However, the Government's proposals to create trawl corridors and to freeze the existing commercial scallop dredging footprint will do little to mitigate the environmental damage caused by scraping the seafloor using indiscriminate fishing methods on these vitally important seabed habitats, nor does it allow for the potential recovery of these biogenic habitats and associated biodiversity to commence.

Continued mobile bottom contact fishing methods are incompatible with Te Mana o te Taiao, the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, which includes the objectives that:

- *By 2025, the number of fishing-related deaths of protected marine species is decreasing towards zero for all species*
- *By 2030 the direct effects of fishing do not threaten protected marine species populations or their recovery*
- *Zero non-target mortality by 2050 and marine fisheries resources are abundant, resilient and managed sustainably to preserve ecosystem integrity*

At the recent Forest and Bird conference you said - *"We need to respond to increasing and cumulative pressures on the marine environment and improve environmental performance, including by addressing depletion of marine life and seabed habitat impacts"*.

Permitting mobile, bottom contact fishing methods to continue within the Gulf is contrary to this statement. Furthermore, it conflicts with the Government's [recently announced Ocean Vision](#) in which the first objective is to *"promote an ecosystem-based approach to research, monitoring and management"*.

You are entitled to regulate fishing methods such as bottom trawling and scallop dredging because section 11 of the Fisheries Act empowers you to set a sustainability measure for an area, taking into account (*inter alia*) the effects of fishing on the aquatic environment. Moreover, under section 11(3) you are empowered to limit areas where a stock can be caught and fishing methods by which a stock can be caught.

The Hauraki Gulf is recognised globally as a biodiversity hotspot for many species and it is one of New Zealand's most valued and intensively used coastal spaces. The HGMP was established in 2000 to provide for the protection and enhancement of the life-supporting capacity of the environment, for the benefit of the Gulf communities.

To start reversing the decades of degradation and restore the health of the Gulf **we ask that as part of the Government's fisheries management response you ban all mobile bottom contact fishing methods.** This means phasing out the use of fishing methods that contact the benthic substrate, such as bottom trawling, scallop dredging, Danish seining and bottom contact precision seafood harvesting over three years, by 2024, from the entire Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, using section 11 of the Fisheries Act. This does not require new legislation and can be implemented with Cabinet approval.

To achieve this the Hauraki Gulf Fish Plan must have a time bound objective to remove these fishing methods and an objective to support commercial fishers to transition to alternative low impact fishing methods (e.g. for scallop fishing allow commercial SCUBA harvesting). The Hauraki Gulf Fish Plan Advisory Group is the appropriate collaborative process to oversee implementation of this.

We look forward to discussing this proposal with you and request a meeting in the new year. Your staff can contact Kat Goddard (katgoddardnz@gmail.com) and Benn Winlove (benn@legasea.co.nz) for further information and to arrange a meeting in the new year.

Yours sincerely,



Jen Miller
Forest & Bird



Sam Woolford
LegaSea



Bob Gutsell
NZSFC



Russel Norman
Greenpeace Aotearoa



Raewyn Peart
EDS



Barry Weeber
ECO



Livia Esterhazy
WWF NZ



Andy Stewart
NZUA



Jim Yeoman
NZ Angling & Casting Association