Tracey Steel
Ministry of Fisheries
PO Box 1020
Wellington
New Zealand

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Submission: IPP - Review of Sustainability Measures and Other Management

Forest & Bird appreciates the opportunity to comment on the IPP by Ministry of Fisheries (MFish).

Forest & Bird

Forest & Bird (Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc) is New Zealand's largest independent conservation organisation. Established in 1923 we have campaigned for over 80 years for the protection of New Zealand's native species and the habitats on which they depend.

We have grown to number around 40,000 members - many of whom join us to save their local species and habitats. Our members are people who care passionately about New Zealand's unique and special natural environment and native species, and want to make sure that these natural treasures are protected so that they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

The constitutional purpose of Forest & Bird is to:

> "*To take all reasonable steps within the power of the Society for the preservation and protection of the indigenous flora and fauna and natural features of New Zealand, for the benefit of the public including future generations."*

Forest & Bird has a long history of advocacy for the protection of New Zealand's marine environment and has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure New Zealand's fisheries are sustainably managed.

Forest &Bird considers that before any increase in TACs and TACCs, full stock assessments should be completed. Without comprehensive assessments of the status of stocks, the Minister should adopt a cautious approach and either retain or reduce current catch limits.

Recommendations

RIG 2 (SPO 2)
Forest & Bird supports MFish's initial view to retain the existing TAC and sector allowances. The biological characteristics of rig make it vulnerable to fishing pressure and any increase in quotas may increase the risks of overfishing this species.

As stated in the May 2009 plenary report:

> *"..reported landings have exceeded the TACC every year since 1991–92"*

and

> *"it is unknown whether the current catch, which is on average (past 4 years) 23% over the TACC, is sustainable."*

A precautionary approach to the status of the stock is therefore warranted, not only to ensure stock sustainability but also because the population has been successively overcaught. It is our view that this behaviour does not warrant an increase in commercial benefit.

Other sustainability considerations that should be considered are the adverse impacts of the fishery on the marine environment and potentially on threatened, endangered or at risk species.

Elephant Fish (ELE 3 and 5)

Forest & Bird does not support MFish's initial view to increase the existing TAC. The biological characteristics of elephantfish make it vulnerable to fishing pressure and any increase in quotas may increase the risks of overfishing this species.

We consider that whilst MFish considers an increase in the TAC may be sustainable in the short term, a long-term approach should be adopted.

The May 2009 plenary states that target and limit reference points have not been established and that the status of the stock in relation to reference points is unknown. A precautionary approach to the status of the stock is therefore warranted, not only to ensure stock sustainability but also because the population has been successively overcaught. It is our view that this behaviour does not warrant an increase in commercial benefit.

Other sustainability considerations that should be considered are the adverse impacts of the fishery on the marine environment and potentially on threatened, endangered or at risk species. This fishery is associated with the bycatch of endangered Hector's dolphins. Because of this, any increase in fishing effort poses an unacceptable increase in the risk to these dolphins and to other marine life.

Forest & Bird supports retention of the current TAC and TACC or a decrease in these levels to account for unknown the lack of comprehensive stock assessments and the adverse impacts on the aquatic environment and marine mammals.

Red Gurnard 3 (GUR 3)

Forest & Bird does not support MFish's initial view to increase the existing TAC.

Just because current 'catches of GUR 3 are around the level of the proposed TACC increase', as stated in the IPP, it does not mean that the TAC should be increased. Given the quotas have been exceeded, it is our view the fishery should not be rewarded for this behaviour.

The May 2009 plenary states that target and limit reference points have not been established and that the status of the stock in relation to reference points is unknown. A precautionary approach to the status of the stock is therefore warranted.

Beach cast seaweed harvesting

Forest & Bird does not support extension of the existing rules to harvest beach cast seaweed. We also recommend that the current rules governing the harvest of beachcast seaweed be reviewed

as it's not known if current harvesting is sustainable or to what degree practices are having an adverse impact on the marine environment.

Whilst harvesting of beachcast seaweed may be sustainable in some areas, there are many areas where it is not desirable. Identifying such areas would be an arduous task that requires a significant volume of information. At this stage, such information is not available. The Minister must therefore adopt a cautious approach. Failure to do so may risk significant adverse impacts on coastal communities, coastal fisheries and the wider marine environment.

Forest & Bird notes:

- Beachcast seaweed is an important contributor to coastal and marine ecosystems. Long-term intensive harvesting could create coastal area habitats similar to beaches that receive no/little beach cast seaweed and significantly affect biodiversity.

- Harvesting could remove an important component from species reliant from it.
    - Consumption of wrack inhabitants by invertebrates, birds and reptiles is the primary route of nutrients from seaweeds to enter terrestrial food webs (dotterels, oystercatchers and gulls are all known to forage wrack).
    - Wrack provides nesting materials and/or shelter to these animals.
    - It may be an important source of nitrogen and other nutrients for foredune plants such as pingao and spinifex.

- Seaweed decomposition is an important nitrogen source for coastal waters due to the relatively rapid release of nutrients with flow on effects up the food chain.

- If seaweed washes back into the sea it provides important habitat for juvenile fish, is consumed by herbivores (such as paua and kina) and filter feeders and is decomposed and consumed by detritivores. Adverse effects from harvesting may be elevated if seaweed is removed at an important settlement time for fishes.

- Wrack is particularly important in the early formation of dune habitat. Dune instability may occur with harvesting.

- Vehicle use in the coastal environment has negative impacts on coastal ecosystems (the extent of the effects depends on where vehicles are operating).

Dredge Oyster (OYS 7C)

Dredging is not a sustainable fishing practice - it has significant adverse effects on benthic species and communities. While MFish continues to focus on the status of the target stock alone, it must also take into accounts the effects of the fishery on the aquatic environment.

The fishing area in which OYS 7C operates is an important area for endangered Hector's dolphins, other cetaceans and marine mammals. Damage to the seafloor by this fishery has a direct and indirect adverse effect on the aquatic environment.

Forest & Bird does not support the current TAC and strongly opposes any increase in TACs.

OREO Fishery (OEO3A)

The management of this fishery's is unsuitable as three different species are lumped into one single management unit. The stock assessment of smooth oreo - 36% B_0 - is not enough to justify an increase in the TAC and TACC for the whole unit, even if it is above the estimated level of

B_{MSY}. As recently reported in the Worm et al paper, fisheries should use this benchmark level as a bottom line limit rather than a target. A biomass well above B_{MSY} is optimal. Increasing the TAC and TACC may increase the risk of pushing the smooth oreo population towards decline.

For black oreo, the last stock assessment was in 2004 and there are huge uncertainties due to sub-area difference in biomass estimates.

Forest & Bird supports Option 1 (*status quo*) - retention of the current TAC and TACC.

Orange Roughy (ORH 3B)

The history of orange roughy fishing in New Zealand (and internationally) has been to severely over-fish populations to the point of collapse. The ORH 3B fishery is in urgent need of a rebuilding strategy. The rebuild of this stock should be implemented immediately.

Forest & Bird support a decrease in the TAC and TACC for ORH3B as follows:

- North West Rise reduced to 410 tonnes or less;
- East and South Chatham Rise reduced to under 3600 tonnes (Spawning Box to be less than 2800 tonnes);
- Puysegur maintained at a catch limit of zero;
- Arrow Plateau maintained at a catch limit of zero;
- Sub-Antarctic set at 1300 tonnes or less with a feature limit of no more than 100-150 tonnes;
- Research survey allowance of 250 tonnes.

We support MFish in setting a 5% allowance for other sources of mortality when setting the TAC.

Forest & Bird oppose the fishing of seamounts and other vulnerable underwater ecosystems. We support the current closure of 19 seamounts in New Zealand's EEZ. However, further protection is needed to safeguard other vulnerable seamounts and ecosystems and the interconnected species that are associated or dependent on orange roughy in the water column.

Forest & Bird strongly oppose the inclusion of the BPAs in the Final Advice Paper to the Minister for reasons previously outlined to the Ministry on multiple occasions.

Hoki Management Measures

Recent positive recruitment findings are welcomed by Forest & Bird. However, we do not support the proposal to increase the current TAC and TACC until several further successful recruitment years are observed and we can be confident that an increase would not pose a risk to the stock.

Forest & Bird also opposes any increase in the TAC and TACC as this may increase the current adverse impacts of this fishery on seabirds, marine mammals, sharks, invertebrates and other non-target species.

Forest & Bird supports measures to achieve a stock split via section 25 or 25B of the Fisheries Act 1996 – a management response that is needed and long overdue.

In relation to the TAC and TACC, Forest & Bird support either a cut (equivalent to a TACC of 80,000 tonnes) or Option 1 – to retain the current TAC and TACC and to continue with the current split of the west and east coast catches. However, we consider that current trends in the capture

of small hoki should be avoided. Reducing the catch in the western end of the Chatham Rise is recommended to achieve this.

We also recommend a revision of the incidental mortality allowance for hoki.

Forest & Bird strongly oppose the inclusion of the BPAs in the Final Advice Paper to the Minister for reasons previously outlined to the Ministry on multiple occasions.

Black Cardinalfish (CDL 2)
Forest & Bird agrees with MFish that maintaining the status quo is not an option for this fishery. We recommend a significant reduction in the TAC and TACC as part of a comprehensive rebuilding strategy for this fishery.

The Harvest Strategy timeframe for rebuild of 12-24 years is inappropriate. The Fisheries Act requires stocks to be managed at a level at or above a level that support MSY. As recently reported in the Worm et al paper, fisheries should use this benchmark level as a bottom limit rather than a target. A biomass well above B_{MSY} is optimal. Forest & Bird consider that any fish stock thought to be at or below B_{MSY} should be managed to rebuild the stock as soon as biologically possible, even if that means closure of the fishery.

The black cardinalfish rebuild strategy options proposed in the IPP does not seek to apply the fastest possible rebuild plan. Forest & Bird recommends that rebuild of this stock be implemented as soon as possible to achieve a biomass above B_{MSY} as soon as biologically possible, even if that means closure of the fishery until stocks are recovered well above B_{MSY}.

Should there be any questions in relation to our submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Kirstie Knowles

Marine Conservation Advocate
Forest & Bird
0 4 801 2210