

Kenepuru & Central Sounds



Residents Association Inc.

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Hon Nathan Guy
The Minister for Primary Industries

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Dear Mr Guy

Kenepuru and Central Sounds Residents' Association – Marlborough Sounds Scallops

Thank you for your letter of 22 June in relation to our concerns over the sustainability of the Marlborough Sounds scallop fishery.

We are encouraged by your assurances that you, through your officials, are keeping a close eye on the state of the fishery. Unfortunately, we fear your officials may be a little too sanguine as to the stewardship exhibited by the commercial scallop industry to date and thus the fishery's sustainability.

Your officials advise that last year the industry voluntarily withdrew from Ship Cove due to high numbers of undersized scallops. Perhaps so, but bear in mind this withdrawal was after they had taken over 75% of the proposed catch for this area.

Ketu Bay is particularly sad. In 2013/14 the industry take was 24 tonnes. This clearly pushed a once abundant scallop area beyond its sustainable limits as in 2014/15 the proposed catch plunged to 4 tonnes reflecting a collapse in scallop density. We suspect that the subsequent decision of the industry to not fish this area was also influenced by the poor condition of scallops reflecting the current concerns over disease issues consistent with a stressed over-exploited fishery.

However, that was last year and we take on board your suggestion to become more closely involved in this year's commercial harvest plan round. To that end we sent a representative to the June SFWG meeting chaired by MPI to review the presentation by NIWA of the 2015 biomass survey results. This was not reassuring.

In a nutshell, as anticipated, the survey confirmed that the Marlborough Sounds scallop fishery continues to decline. The estimated biomass figure fell again. It is now at an all time historic low.

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Notwithstanding the refinement of using an exploitation factor of 0.22 (versus one of 0.45), the estimated yield figure NIWA came up with based on an acknowledged biomass historic low is, bizarrely, **greater** than the industry's recorded catch for last season. NIWA did not dispute that this figure was reached by accruing estimated tonnages from sample quadrants where the density of scallops was not at commercial levels.

Our confidence in the process was not helped when the senior NIWA scientist presenter was questioned further over these anomalies, he made it clear he was only there to present the survey results and not to contribute to any discussion as to appropriate management decisions arising from the survey report.

Sadly, the refinement of the exploitation factor may be too little too late. Remember, the commercial take from the Marlborough Sounds in 2009 was 101 tonnes, then to 74 tonnes in 2010, to 60 tonnes, to 47.8 tonnes, to 42.9 tonnes, to 21.5 tonnes last year. In tandem with this, the biomass surveys also trended down to this year's historic low. This was exactly the trend in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay which have now been closed for 3 and 9 years respectively with no sign of commercial viability.

In an ideal world the industry would accept the reality of what is happening and this year put up a zero harvest plan. With some compensatory adjustments to the management of the recreational sector (e.g. shorter season, reduced catch per person/boat limits and closure of some areas), this may provide the platform for the fishery to rebuild.

We will have our representatives put this to industry in the coming weeks but urge you to discuss this proposal with your officials on the basis as to why this should not happen. We do not believe that you would want to oversee the complete destruction of this fishery on your watch as Minister.

We would be happy to meet with you at short notice, as we believe the situation is dire.

Yours sincerely



Ross Withell

President
Kenepuru and Central Sounds Residents' Association