



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



Hope for the Kaikoura paua fishery, five years post-earthquake

When the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake struck at midnight on November 14, 2016, the damage to the paua fishery was immense. That the fishery could reopen this coming summer is a testament to the hard work and sacrifice of many disparate groups, who worked together with a common goal.

While all shellfish and seaweed species were affected by the upward thrust of the seabed along 110 kilometres of coastline, with the seismic uplift thrusting the seabed up to six metres in places, paua were particularly affected because their main habitat is close inshore.

The affected areas were closed to all paua harvesting for an indefinite period to allow the area to recover and commercial quota owners and divers had their Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) halved, causing enormous financial pressure. Most were small family-owned businesses catching family-owned quota who lived locally, but they fully supported the Minister's actions to close the fishery.

The Minister will be making decisions later this year, guided by officials' advice, on the package of measures for reopening. Included in this will be TACC settings.

For commercial divers in the Kaikoura (PAU3) area, a subdivision of the PAU3 fishery has been approved, meaning there will be two new Quota Management Areas (QMAs). PAU3A, which is currently closed, and PAU3B, which is still open. In PAU3B there will be no real change to management settings, as the area is unaffected by the quake. In PAU3A it is likely a TACC of about 22.5 tonnes will be declared, which is 50 percent of the average annual long term catch from the area pre-earthquake.

Industry will also be constrained by any time limits on the catch season along with recreational.

Furthermore, commercial divers will catch at a higher harvest size to help protect spawning biomass, probably in the 130 to 140mm range, use area-based harvest arrangement to avoid localised depletion, collect fine scale data to inform future management, and develop a harvest control rule to help guide future catch levels.

The intention has always been to leave the area closed to all paua take until scientific assessments indicated the Minister could be satisfied reopening would meet his requirement to allow utilisation while ensuring sustainability.

In the five years since the closure the commercial industry has collaborated closely with its community, especially Te Runuka o Kaikoura, Te Korowai, The Kaikoura Guardians and the Ministry to ensure that the fishery was looked after as it recovered. They instituted a science programme in partnership with Kaikoura High School students to monitor and help with reseedling the paua in damaged areas and worked with Canterbury University on monitoring programmes.

Whilst it was expected it would be seven or eight long years before the fishery opened to harvest, this week, five years on, the Ministry is proposing a 1 December to 1 March opening and has launched a consultation process.

The collaboration amongst all users of the fishery should be applauded. There was a bigger than expected survival of adult paua and the spawning cycles re-established much more quickly than expected.

It is a precautionary approach. Bag limits, vehicle and vessel limits and a new minimum size are proposed.

The consultation paper suggests a new daily bag limit of three paua per person, which is reduced from five per person prior to the closure.

Vessel and vehicle limits are also proposed, whereas previously there were none. The paper suggests limiting vessels and vehicles to 12 paua only, or one paua per person in the vehicle or vessel, whichever is greatest.

And the new minimum legal size will increase from 125mm prior to the closure to 130mm.

The commercial paua industry hope that the proposals made by the Guardians of Kaikoura get public support. Paua Industry Council Chairman, Storm Stanley says they believe they are a good balance between allowing everyone to gather paua for a feed this summer and ensuring that there isn't a 'goldrush' which could wreck the recovery of the fishery.

The shorter season will allow the science to be gathered to ensure sustainability before the 2022 season.

Stanley predicts that if there is good support for this proposed package of measures the fishery will be back to near normal in a few years' time.

Stanley says full credit must be given to Fisheries New Zealand for managing this extraordinary

event so well and funding and managing the science effort that went into getting to this point.

But we must also thank the Kaikoura community and iwi for their stoicism and patience in the face of such a disaster.

Submissions on the proposal can be made here: [Kaikoura paua reopening](#).



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