



**Submission on proposed reopening of Whangārei Harbour
to recreational scallop fishing**

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About us

1. Revive Our Gulf Trust (ROG) is a marine restoration kaupapa working to rebuild kūtai (green-lipped mussel) reef ecosystems in the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi.
2. We work in partnership with Tangata Whenua, including Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, and alongside our science partner, Waipapa Taumata Rau / University of Auckland Institute of Marine Sciences.
3. Our vision is a Hauraki Gulf ecosystem with restored mauri / life essence and returned to a state of natural biodiversity and abundance.
4. This submission is from the Revive Our Gulf Trust and does not represent the views of all project partners.

General Comments

5. ROG supports Option 1 and recommends retaining the current prohibition on recreational scallop harvesting in Whangārei Harbour until a wider management approach for Northland and Coromandel scallops has been developed. We do not support Options 2 or 3 on the information currently available.
6. We recognise the social, cultural and economic value of recreational access to scallops. However, the available evidence does not provide sufficient confidence that reopening can occur without risking localised depletion, reduced recruitment and the wider recovery of northern scallop populations.
7. The consultation document itself identifies many of these risks. Fisheries New Zealand acknowledges the prospect of concentrated fishing pressure in what would be the only open scallop fishery in north-eastern New Zealand; the inability of the proposed controls to limit the number of participating fishers or fishing events; the importance of maintaining density for scallop reproduction; and the possibility that Whangārei populations are connected with scallop beds elsewhere in north-eastern New Zealand.
8. In our view, these uncertainties support continuing the precautionary approach taken when SCA 1 was closed in 2022. Signs of persistence or recovery in a small number of beds are encouraging, but do not yet provide a sufficient basis for reopening while the wider northern scallop fishery remains closed and recovering.

Scientific evidence and recovery

9. The consultation was initially based on preliminary results from five of the nine strata included in the 2026 Whangārei Harbour survey. Fisheries New Zealand states that those results had not yet been through its science working-group process and remained subject to change. On 15 September, supplementary information was released for two

further sites, Snake Bank and Marsden Cove, meaning information is now available for seven of the nine sites. The survey remains incomplete, and complete and final results will not be available during the consultation period. We consider that this limits submitters' ability to assess the full evidence that will ultimately be available to inform the Minister's decision.

10. Of the five strata reported in the original consultation document, almost all legal sized scallop biomass was concentrated in Urquharts and McDonald Bank East. The three other strata contained very little biomass at legal size or at the higher densities considered relevant to successful reproduction. At the two sites where density could be compared directly with 2024, density declined between 2024 and 2026. The 2026 survey also found fewer juvenile and pre-recruit scallops at Urquharts than in 2024, which Fisheries New Zealand notes may mean abundance reduces in future years. Harvesting legal-sized scallops from the remaining high-density beds may further reduce their reproductive capacity and resilience.
11. We note the caution publicly expressed by Earth Sciences New Zealand scallop specialist James Williams, who analysed the survey data. New Zealand Geographic reported that he considers the Whangārei populations to be among the only remaining high-density scallop beds between North Cape and the Bay of Plenty and identified over-depletion and local overfishing as the principal risks of reopening.
12. We understand that the next Fisheries New Zealand scallop surveys in the Hauraki Gulf are planned for mid-2027. We consider that this work should contribute to a stronger evidence base for the future management of northern scallops. The results should be considered alongside the complete 2026 Whangārei results, evidence of recruitment and population trends, understanding of connectivity between scallop beds, cumulative environmental pressures, Tangata Whenua views, and the development of a coordinated management approach for northern scallops. In our view, any future consideration of recreational harvest should follow from that wider assessment rather than from completion of any single survey programme.

Fishing pressure and management risk

13. If reopened, Whangārei Harbour would be the only recreational scallop fishery open in northeastern New Zealand. Strong interest can be expected from fishers across Northland, Auckland and the Hauraki Gulf after four years of closure. Daily limits restrict individual take but do not cap the number of participating fishers, fishing trips or the total recreational harvest.
14. We are also concerned about the basis for the proposed 1.2 tonne recreational allowance. The allowance was developed using a 15% harvest rate applied to estimated potential legal-sized biomass. At the time the proposal was developed, this estimate included an assumption that the four survey sites for which results were not then available would contain an additional 25% biomass. Fisheries New Zealand notes that, if final abundance is lower, further restrictions may be required. Two of those additional

site results have since been released (on 15 September). In our view, the proposed allowance should be reassessed against the complete survey results rather than relying on assumptions about biomass in sites for which results were unavailable when the proposal was developed.

15. Historical estimates of recreational harvest also carry material uncertainty. Fisheries New Zealand identifies the 2017/18 National Panel Survey as the best available information for Whangārei Harbour, but notes that it was based on a relatively small number of survey participants and therefore has high uncertainty. That information was also collected when recreational scallop fisheries elsewhere in SCA 1 and SCA CS remained available. The behaviour and distribution of fishing effort in a situation where Whangārei Harbour is the only available fishery may be materially different.

Tangata whenua and wider ecosystem considerations

16. We acknowledge the position of Te Rerenga Parāoa tāngata whenua, who do not support reopening at this time. Fisheries New Zealand records that Tangata Kaitiaki/Tiaki have been limiting customary scallop authorisations and consider that the fishery has not recovered to a level that enables the full exercise of customary fishing rights. It also records concerns that reopening could affect the availability of scallops for customary purposes, and that the Mid-North East Iwi Fisheries Forum has identified scallops as a taonga species. These views should carry significant weight in decisions about future management of the fishery.
17. The remaining high density scallop beds in Whangārei Harbour may also contribute to recovery beyond the Harbour through larval movement. Fisheries New Zealand notes evidence suggesting connectivity between scallop beds across north eastern New Zealand, although the extent and present significance of that connectivity remain uncertain. Scallop populations also remain very exposed to non-fishing pressures including sedimentation, nutrient inputs, habitat degradation and the effects of climate change.
18. Reopening would also create additional biosecurity pathways associated with exotic Caulerpa. Fisheries New Zealand identifies scallop harvesting, vessel anchoring and the movement of scallop shells as activities that may fragment or spread Caulerpa. We acknowledge that detections in Whangārei Harbour to date have been small patches that were treated and that Fisheries New Zealand reports no current evidence of a larger-scale presence. Nevertheless, introducing additional vessel, anchoring, diving and harvesting activity creates an avoidable pathway for further spread at a time when exotic Caulerpa remains a significant biosecurity issue in northern New Zealand.

Conclusion

19. ROG supports Option 1, that Whangārei Harbour remain closed to recreational scallop harvesting.