

Hon David Parker

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

18 March 2022

Open Letter – Protecting Scallop Fisheries

Dear Hon David Parker

Forest & Bird is seriously concerned about the state of scallops in Te Tai Tokerau Northland, Tīkapa Moana the Hauraki Gulf, and Te Tara o te Ika a Māui the Coromandel. We strongly urge you to close the SCA 1 and SCA CS fisheries under the Fisheries Act 1996.

The scallop stocks are critically low, to such an extent that they are at risk of functional extinction in some areas. The Ministry for Primary Industries does not hold any information on the level of the stock required to maintain the ecological functions of scallops as long-term carbon storage or as a water filter. Sedimentation is damaging the marine environment for scallops and dredging for scallops is damaging the sea floor. This situation is untenable and an indictment of Aotearoa New Zealand's marine management.

The Government has committed to ecosystem-based management of fisheries in Te Mana o te Taiao. The sound management of healthy shellfish populations is a vital underpinning for ecosystem-based fisheries management in Northland, the Coromandel and the Hauraki Gulf. The Hauraki Gulf shellfish once daily filtered four and a half times the volume of the Gulf, a critical ecosystem function that has been all but lost.

Forest & Bird acknowledges and supports:

- the tikanga rāhui placed by Ngāti Paoa, Ngāti Hei, Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa and Ngāti Manuhiri for the protection of tipa (scallops) and other taonga species. We acknowledge the minister approving the 186a temporary closure applications for Ngāti Paoa and Ngāti Hei, however we are disappointed it took one year to acknowledge the directive of iwi.
- hapū- and iwi-led rāhui for the protection of taonga species and the mauri of the moana.

Forest & Bird also seeks a commercial and recreational ban on dredging for scallops. This method of fishing is destructive, indiscriminate and seriously damages the seafloor. Once fisheries are reopened after closure, only low-impact hand-gathering methods should be permitted. Dredging should not be considered an option in the future due to the impact on benthic ecosystems.

Forest & Bird is concerned that the scallop dredging industry may put forward an alternative plan for the management of the fishery. We have no confidence in the ability of the scallop dredgers to responsibly manage the fishery, given the parlous state of the fishery, concerns about alleged illegal scallop dredging carried out at night without lights, and the offensive and inappropriate behaviour of scallop dredgers who dredged the Ngāti Hei rāhui area while flying a pirate flag. Filmed on 11 August 2021, this incident involved three vessels plowing the seafloor between Kūaotunu and Otama, and around Black Jack headland. This demonstrates the disrespect of commercial operators, blatantly flouting a rāhui that was put in place with wide support from hapū, recreational fishers and the local community, to protect already devastated scallop beds.

Finally, Forest & Bird notes the threat to shellfish posed by sedimentation and urges you to work with regional and territorial authorities to prevent further sedimentation of these waters through poor land and water management.

We urge you to act.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Hague
CEO Forest & Bird