

14 September 2022

Caulerpa Response
Biosecurity New Zealand
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**FISHERIES INSHORE NEW ZEALAND SUBMISSION ON:
PROPOSED CONTROLLED AREA NOTICE
AOTEA-GREAT BARRIER ISLAND**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposal to establish a new Controlled Area Notice for Caulerpa over the south-eastern side of Aotea-Great Barrier Island.

Fisheries Inshore New Zealand Ltd (Fisheries Inshore) provides this feedback on behalf of our Northern Committee representing commercial fishers, fishing companies and fish processors (licensed fish receivers) operating in and with interests in fisheries in North Island waters comprising Fisheries Management Areas 1, 8 and 9, the Leigh and Coromandel Commercial Fishermen's Associations, the Kina Industry Association. We note the CRA 2 Rock Lobster Management Co Ltd. is also providing a response on behalf of interests in the rock lobster fishery.

Fisheries Inshore note that commercial fishers, quota owners, and independent companies may also provide feedback directly to you.

Fisheries Inshore New Zealand

Fisheries Inshore represents 80% by value and volume of the inshore finfish, pelagic, and tuna fisheries of New Zealand. Our role is to deal with national issues on behalf of the sector and to work directly with and on behalf of its quota owners, fishers, committees. As part of that, we work collaboratively with other Sector Representative Entities particularly DWG, Te Ohu Kaimoana, Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) and the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Our key outputs are the development of, and agreement to appropriate policy frameworks, processes, and tools to assist the sector to more effectively manage inshore, pelagic, and tuna fish stocks, to minimise their interactions with the associated ecosystems and work positively with other fishers and users of marine space where we carry out our harvesting activities.

Impact on fishers

The proposed Controlled Area (CAN) will have a significant impact on commercial fishers that fish or anchor within the proposed area. Aotea-Great Barrier Island and the adjacent Colville Channel on the western side of the island are highly productive areas for a number of fisheries including rock lobster, kina and finfish (snapper) and small pelagic fish (pilchards, blue and Jack mackerel). The western side of the Barrier is also heavily utilized by fishers when easterly prevailing winds make open sea areas unsuitable for fishing.

Commercial fishers active in the area are either based on the Island or come from ports further afield including Whitianga, Leigh, Auckland and Tauranga.

Anchoring within the proposed Controlled Area

Commercial fishers across a range of fisheries have highlighted the importance of anchoring within the proposed CAN when fishing around Aotea or in the wider area. Twenty four fishers that have been fishing within the proposed closed area in the last three years use anchorages on a regular basis. An additional 44 fishers actively fish within 20nm of Aotea, many of which have also identified using anchorages within the proposed CAN.

Longline fishers use the area for anchoring when fishing in the area around Aotea and the Colville Channel, or when rough sea conditions in the outer Gulf force them to seek safe shelter. Key anchorages include Whangaparapara, Tryphena, Bowling Alley and Sandy Bays.

Longline fishers typically operate 3 day trips, travelling to Aotea during the day, anchoring overnight, leaving the bays to set their longlines in the early morning before dawn. The fishing gear and catch is retrieved during the day, after which, they anchor up to prepare for the next day and overnight, again leaving the anchorage in the very earlier morning to travel the fishing area and set their gear before dawn. After fishing they will steam back to the mainland to unload their catch.

Fishers have highlighted that there are no alternative sites that offer safe anchoring around Aotea or nearby to the proposed CAN. Alternatives are an additional 2 to 3 hours away. Using the alternative sites will add considerable cost and time to a fishing trip. This will impact fishers in a variety of ways, but most significantly contributing to health and safety issues through longer working hours and increased fatigue. This is recognised as a significant issue for smaller inshore fishing vessels with a crew of two to three and contributes to increased risk of injuries and accidents if not actively managed. Other impacts include increased fuel use and costs, carbon emissions and lost fishing time which may result in fishing in the area economically un-viable for some operators.

Fishing within the proposed Controlled Area

The proposed Controlled Area will also impact fishing activity that occurs within and across the boundary of the proposed CAN. Impacts will vary across each fishery with snapper longliners and kina divers frequent users of the area accounting for 105 tonnes and 12.5 tonnes of catch respectively over the last 3 years. It should not be assumed that this catch can be taken from other areas without adverse impacts elsewhere, particularly for kina.

Other fisheries and methods (small pelagic (pilchard, blue and Jack mackerel)/purse seine, bottom trawl and Danish seine operate infrequently within or across the boundary of the proposed CAN, but are most active in the area adjacent to the CAN.

Reducing impacts of the proposed Controlled Area

Manage according to risk

The existing CAN prohibits the removal of fish (sea organisms). We assume this prohibition is in place to reduce the risk of human activity spreading *Caulerpa* beyond its current distribution through fouling on fishing gear and anchors rather than the fish itself.

Rather than take a blunt approach by prohibiting fishing, we support the use of protocols to manage the actual risk of spreading *Caulerpa*. This would be consistent with how other equipment and anchors are

dealt with under section 8 of the existing Controlled Area Notice and similar to how Didymo is managed in the South Island to allow continued use and access of rivers including for freshwater fishing.

Identifying high and low risk areas

The current distribution and size of infestations throughout the proposed CAN varies considerably. We consider the impacts of the proposed CAN could be reduced though managing smaller areas with ongoing surveillance rather than the blanket ban as currently proposed. Areas that are highly infested with Caulerpa could be marked with buoys allowing continued access to low risk areas.

Amending the Boundaries of the CAN

The proposed CAN includes Buffer Zones to the north (the Broken Islands and Bowling Alley Bay) and south (Sandy Bay) and approximately 2.5 nm from the coastline where infestations have not been currently identified. Removing these bays and reducing the extension from the coast from the proposed CAN will enable commercial fishers to access anchorage and maintain fishing grounds without restriction.

Installing moorings to reduce the risk of spreading Caulerpa

We support installing moorings for fishers to use in areas where Caulerpa is known to be present in high density to reduce the risk of spreading the pest through anchoring. While we are currently focused on the short-term, installing mooring will contribute long-term benefits to reduce the risk of spreading the pest.

Rapid transition to Pest and Pathway Management

Experience tells us that eradication or localized control of introduced species within the marine environment is extremely difficult, unlikely to be successful, requiring continuous ongoing pest management at significant cost.

This is unfortunately the current situation as biosecurity authorities prepare to move from a Response phase, when eradication has been determined as not feasible, to a Long-term Management phase where we seek to minimize impacts and the spread of the Caulerpa into new areas.

Commercial fishers support making the transition as quickly as possible to;

- minimize the risk of spreading Caulerpa to other areas,
- reduce the disruption and negative impacts on their businesses by maintaining access to key areas for anchoring and fishing, and
- avoiding a drawn-out transition over an extended two-year period as currently proposed to end up with a similar set of protocols that could have been implemented more rapidly.

We're here to help

Commercial fishers have a lot to contribute to minimize potential impacts of Caulerpa on the marine environment and ensuring biosecurity management controls are effective.

As a sector, commercial fishers are familiar working in a highly regulatory environment (Maritime and Fisheries) and demonstrate professional responsibility. We are able to work with known fishers on education and awareness, developing and implementing operational procedures, compliance and reporting. Commercial fishers have real-time vessel monitoring and electronic reporting systems in place that can be used to support biosecurity pest and pathway management activities.

Commercial fishers would like to work with Biosecurity New Zealand to develop and implement a set of agreed protocols to avoid spreading the pest into new areas. The protocols would be implemented either through authorized permitted activities subject to conditions and directions if a CAN is implemented, or as voluntary agreements in areas not included within a CAN.

The protocols would likely cover;

- inspection of fishing gear and anchors and any other equipment used within a CAN or areas outside of a CAN that have been identified as high risk to further incursion,
- cleaning or treatment of fishing gear or anchors (including chains and ropes) that are found to be fouled with *Caulerpa* prior to moving into a different area,
- reporting to Biosecurity NZ when anchoring or fishing within the CAN (possibly through a daily report from Fisheries New Zealand utilizing vessel tracking data,
- reporting to Biosecurity NZ when *Caulerpa* fouling occurs within or outside of a CAN.

We consider a rapid transition to operating under a set of agreed protocols that manage the biosecurity risk as preferable to the alternative of exclusion with associated loss of income and increased operational costs whilst a pest or pathway management plan is developed over the next one to two years.

Checking and cleaning fishing gear would be very feasible as the gear is already inspected and handled as longlines are hauled back on board.

We note that exclusion from the area will not stop the continued rapid natural spread of *Caulerpa* along the Aotea coastline as has occurred since the present CAN has been in place.

Supporting Surveillance

In addition to developing operation protocols to reduce the spread of *Caulerpa*, commercial fishers have been quick to offer their support to undertake surveillance activities during their fishing operations to detect incursions into new areas, both around GBI and further afield. This could include the use of cameras deployed from rock lobster vessels, visual inspections when diving for kina.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss points raised in this response.

Yours sincerely

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