

Review of the snapper fishery (SNA 1)

Q&As as at 9 August 2013

Snapper stock in quota management area SNA 1

Background

Q1: Where is SNA 1?

A: SNA 1 is included in an area from the tip of East Northland down to the Bay of Plenty.

Q2: How do current levels compare to historical levels?

A: Since the introduction of the QMS the SNA 1 stock has increased; with the Hauraki Gulf recording the largest increase at 68%.

Q3: When was the last time that the fishery was assessed?

A: The last SNA 1 stock assessment was completed 13 years ago in 2000. Management settings were last reviewed in 1997.

Q4: How do the recreational and commercial catches compare?

A: The current allowance for recreational and customary fishers is 2600 tonnes and the catch in 2011/12 was estimated at approximately 3800 tonnes (excluding catch from recreational charter vessels). The total allowable commercial catch in 2011/12 was 4500 tonnes, with the actual catch reported as 4615 tonnes.

Q5: What is the biggest risk to the recovery of the SNA 1?

A: The fishery has been rebuilding. The increase in biomass is driven by the higher than average numbers of young fish coming into the population – known as recruitment – and the level of harvest. Recruitment is significantly influenced by environmental factors and warm years tend to produce more juveniles than cold years.

To ensure that the stock rebuilds to the management target it is important to manage all catch within specified limits. Ongoing levels of catch well above the Total Allowable Commercial Catch and allowances set pose a risk to any rebuild strategy.

Q6: How many jobs are built around the SNA 1 area?

A: Snapper represents around 85% of the value of commercial fisheries in the Hauraki Gulf. Around 820 full time jobs result from direct employment in fishing related jobs in Auckland and a further 360 jobs in Waikato – giving a total of nearly 1200 full time jobs. The recreational fishery supports many jobs associated with the manufacture and retail of boats and fishing tackle and provision of bait and fuel.

Q7: Is MPI committed to a sustainable snapper fishery that will support both the recreational and commercial sectors?

A: Yes. Snapper were introduced into New Zealand's Quota Management System (QMS) in 1986 and the SNA 1 stock has been slowly rebuilding since. The QMS sets catch limits that allow the sustainable use of the snapper resource based on scientific stock assessments.

Q8: Why is the recreational sector the only one being targeted?

A: The recreational sector is not the only one being targeted. The paper contains three options for how many snapper can be caught overall. Once the overall catch is determined there is a lot of choice about how that catch is allocated between recreational, customary and commercial. The next decision will be whether any changes to other controls like bag limits are necessary and if they are, what those changes should be.

A wide range of options exist and there could be increases or decreases to allowances for either recreational or commercial catch or both.

Q9: Why are recreational fishers being constrained to an allowance that was set in 1997?

A: There are a range of options proposed from retaining the current recreational allowance through to increasing the allowance to cover current levels of catch. Within these options there could be increases or decreases to both commercial and recreational limits.

Q10: Why is the Ministry proposing a daily bag limit of three snapper?

A: This is one option of many in the paper. The paper outlines options for daily bag limits somewhere between three and nine per person per day and/or a Minimum Legal Size somewhere between 27 cm to 36 cm.

Q11: What is being done about the commercial trawlers dumping fish and catching lots of juveniles?

A: There are a number of controls in place to protect juvenile snapper including closed areas and restrictions on mesh size. The initial position paper contains an estimate of 450 tonnes for other sources of mortality which includes mortality associated with harvesting eg small snapper, snapper lost when gear breakages occur and mortality of fish that escape the net.

This information is uncertain and we are working closely with the fishing industry to gain more accurate information. We are also working with industry on plans for increased monitoring of commercial fishing activity. MPI should be contacted promptly with any information on illegal discarding of snapper on **0800 4 Poacher (0800 4762241)**.

Q13: Why are spawning stocks of snapper not protected?

A: Unlike mammals, snapper produce millions of eggs over a protracted period of time. The best ways to increase the size of the stock are to reduce the overall catch and/or to reduce mortality of juvenile fish. MPI will be looking at ways of reducing juvenile mortality as part of future management.

Reason for Review

Q14: Why is MPI undertaking a review now?

A: Snapper is a high priority species. MPI has new information on the health of the fishery, and levels of overall catch. The total allowance is currently being exceeded.

Q 15: Are current catches unsustainable?

No. Current catches are biologically sustainable. MPI however wants to manage a rebuild of the population to a level that enables the most benefit to all fishers. This is a management target as opposed to a sustainability limit, and we will be working with all stakeholders to identify the best way of managing this fishery.

Q 16: Is the Bay of Plenty population in crisis?

A: The best available information suggests that there is considerable mixing between the Bay of Plenty population and the Hauraki Gulf population. Overall, both populations continue to improve.

Q17: Is it true that fishing should leave stocks at 40% of their estimated historical level?

A: A long-term target for SNA 1 has not been determined. At the moment we are operating at an interim revised target of 40% of the unfished level. This interim target was used for the purposes of the 2013 stock assessment. A long-term target will be discussed with stakeholders as part of developing a long-term management strategy for SNA 1 over the next 12-24 months.

Q18: Who can I talk to with any questions about the review?

A: Please go to www.mpi.govt.nz for all available information.

Process for the Review

Q 19: What is the end to end process for changing rules in the snapper fishery?

A: Based on best available information, MPI develops a full range of options and consults all stakeholders on behalf of the Minister.

Following consultation, MPI analyses the submissions received and develops final advice to the Minister. The final advice can include any new options raised as part of consultation. The Minister then makes a decision. Any potential catch limit changes would be implemented from 1 October. Any other rule changes (such as bag limits or size restrictions) would be implemented from 1 April 2014.

Q20: What is the process for consultation? Where can I go for more information about it?

A: MPI started a six week consultation on 12 July 2013. People can go to www.mpi.govt.nz to view the consultation document and also find out how to make a submission.

MPI also held a series of public information sessions in Auckland, Tauranga and Whangarei where information on the snapper fishery and the IPP was available, and staff were on hand to answer questions.

Q21: What happens to my submission, will it count?

A: Following consultation MPI will compile a Final Advice Paper summarising MPI and stakeholder views and provide advice and recommendations to the Minister for Primary Industries. The Minister will take into account the views of people expressed.

Q22: Will I be able to see other people's submissions?

A: MPI will provide a summary of submissions and these will be made available in due course.

Options

Q23: What are the options in the review?

A: All options within the range being consulted on are on the table.

These include:

- Status quo
- Increase to current catch levels
- Decrease to current catch levels

And a range of options for how any change in catch could be allocated between sectors and how that could be managed.

Q24: MPI has expressed some preferences for options in the paper. Why?

A: MPI does not have a preference on the majority of options in the paper. Where any preference is expressed it is MPI's views prior to consultation only. Any preference expressed in the paper does not represent the Minister's view and does not prevent him from choosing an alternative approach.

Q25: Is MPI looking at reducing the recreational snapper take while backing off a proposed reduction in the commercial quota?

A: MPI is committed to developing a snapper fishery that maximises the benefits to all sectors. We will be seeking input from stakeholders on a full range of options.

Q26: How will the review impact on Maori Customary Fishing Rights?

A: All Maori claims to the commercial take of fish (both marine and freshwater fish) were settled in 1992 (under the Treaty of Waitangi Fisheries Claims Settlements Act 1992). The Settlement requires the Minister to make regulations that recognise and provide for the extent of customary non-commercial fishing. When setting catch quotas an allowance must first be made for customary non-commercial fishing

The availability of snapper impacts on the ability of customary fishers to take catch. MPI does not support limiting the customary harvest.

Q27: Are iwi/hapu affected by the review?

A: Any review of SNA1 quota limits will make an allowance for the level of customary fishing that is required to meet the needs of tangata whenua to provide for customary purposes. However, if changes are required to be made to recreational catch allowances and fishing rules, tangata whenua who catch fish in a recreational capacity will be affected by any changes to those regulations.

Q28: Is MPI recommending reducing the recreational catch to support its Export Double goal?

A: MPI is consulting on a full range of options. No decision has been made. The Minister for Primary Industries will make a decision after considering the best available information on fish stock, views of stakeholders and advice from MPI.