



Office of Hon Phil Heatley

MP for Whangarei

Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture

Minister of Housing

16 DEC 2010

H1011

Dear Fisheries Stakeholder

I write to inform you of the decisions I have made for the management of the Marlborough Sounds amateur blue cod fishery. I have decided to re-open the blue cod fishery with a set of new management measures in place. My decisions will come into effect on **1 April 2011**.

The blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds is one of the iconic recreational fisheries in New Zealand and offers important benefit to recreational fishers. Use of the fishery must, however, be balanced against the need to promote the future health of blue cod populations in the Marlborough Sounds to ensure that future generations can also experience this valued resource.

The intent of the original closure was to both halt any further decline of blue cod abundance in the closed areas and provide a window for recreational stakeholders to work together to develop a new approach to managing the amateur fishery. This opportunity has now been provided and a set of management tools developed.

I carefully considered all information available when making my decision. The most recent scientific survey data suggests that, while the closure since October 2008 has probably led to an increase in adult blue cod abundance, an increase in juvenile blue cod in the region is not yet apparent. Given the available information, I believe a cautious management approach is warranted to ensure an increase in blue cod abundance while enabling recreational fishers to utilise the fishery.

I note that the majority of submitters generally agreed that new management measures were necessary to increase abundance of blue cod in the Sounds if the fishery is reopened. In reaching my decisions I have considered the submissions received on the Ministry's initial position paper and final advice from the Ministry. I also considered the relevant legislative provisions and my obligations under the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act).

My decisions on new management rules for the Marlborough Sounds amateur blue cod fishery are to:

- Amend the Fisheries (Challenger Area Amateur Fishing) Regulations 1986 to revoke the prohibition on taking blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds from 1 April 2011; and
- Implement the following rules to the Marlborough Sounds Area (MSA) to support the fishery by amending the Fisheries (Challenger Area Amateur Fishing) Regulations 1986;
 - i. A maximum bag limit of two blue cod per person per day (including a prohibition on possession of more than this amount, for any reason including transporting, in the Marlborough Sounds Area);
 - ii. A minimum legal size limit (MLS) of 30cm and maximum legal size limit (MaxLS) of 35cm ("slot limit") for blue cod;

- iii. A seasonal opening from 20 December – 31 August;
- iv. A hook limit of a maximum two hooks per line when fishing for any finfish species;
- v. A personal accumulation limit of one daily bag limit of blue cod (including a prohibition on possession of more than this amount, for any reason including transporting, in the Marlborough Sounds Area);
- vi. A requirement for amateur fishers to possess blue cod in a whole or gutted state only, unless for immediate personal consumption;
- vii. A no take zone surrounding Maud Island (figure 3);
- viii. Input the following rules into the Challenger (East) Area to the fishery;
- ix. A requirement for amateur fishers to possess blue cod in the whole or gutted state, unless for immediate personal consumption, to the Challenger (East) Area; and
- x. A personal accumulation limit of two daily bag limits to the Challenger (East) Area (including a prohibition on possession of more than this amount, for any reason including transporting, in the Challenger (East) Area).

I acknowledge that these new rules will impact on a wider area than that currently closed to amateur fishing for blue cod. I decided to implement the measures to a wider region as blue cod populations have declined in most parts of the Sounds outside the closed area. Application to the wider area should also make rules easier for fishers to remember and simpler for Ministry officers to monitor and enforce.

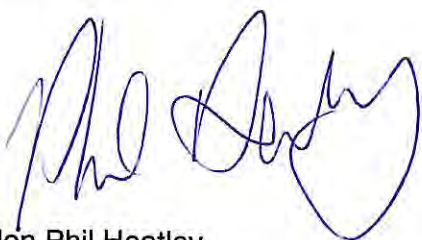
I consider that the bag limit and accumulation limit will combine to manage amateur catch in the Sounds to levels likely to allow blue cod populations to increase. The fishing season, slot limit and hook limit should help to protect pre-recruits and spawning fish, and support blue cod reproduction, thus aiding a rebuild of the populations.

The no-take area around Maud Island should provide an opportunity to monitor changes in the abundance and population structure of blue cod with removal of amateur fishing effort and may also benefit abundance the local populations within the rest of the Sounds via the transfer of adults, eggs and larvae as it has been identified as an area with a relatively high spawning biomass.

The introduction of a filleting rule and accumulation limit to the Challenger (East) Area and may reduce any long-term risk of over fishing in area due to effort being transferred away from the MSA. It will also aid Ministry officers in monitoring and enforcing the bag limit and minimum legal size limit.

Ongoing monitoring of the Sounds blue cod populations will inform future adjustments to the fishing rules, in order to maximise benefit to recreational fishers while aiming to ensure the future health of blue cod populations in the Sounds.

Kind regards



Hon Phil Heatley
Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture

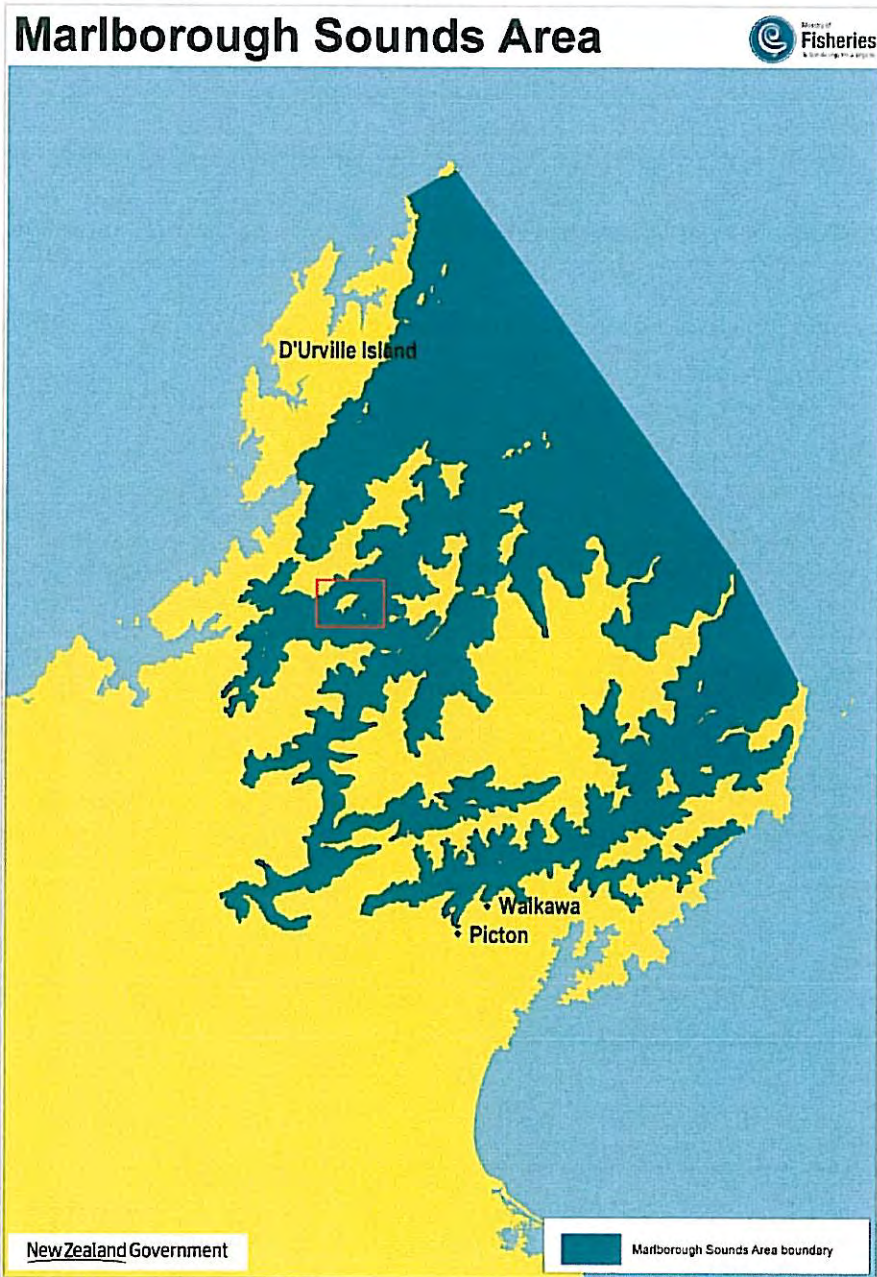


Figure 1. Marlborough Sounds Area to which the new rules will apply. Red box indicates location of the no-take zone around Maud Island, detailed in figure 2.

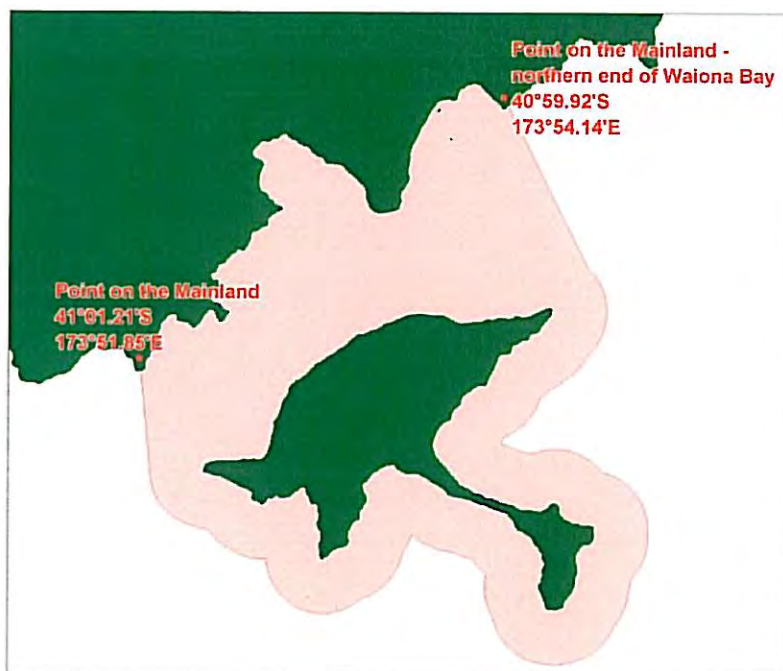


Figure 2. Proposed No Take Zone for Maud Island showing a) its position in the Marlborough Sounds and (b) the boundaries of the proposed zone.

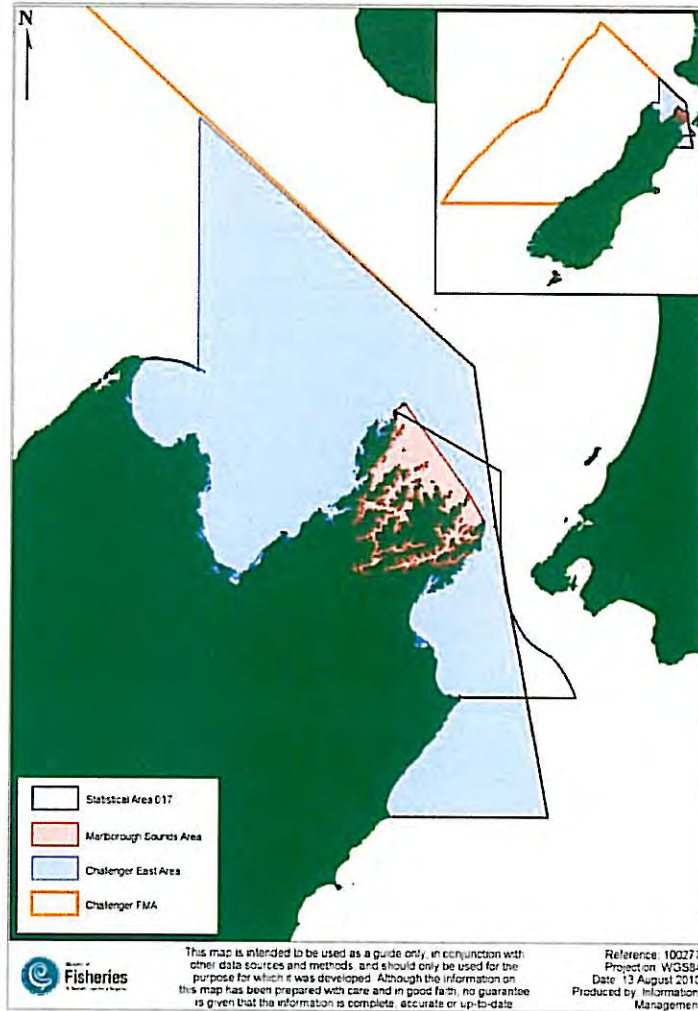


Figure 3. Boundaries of the BCO7 quota management area (shown as “Challenger Area”), the Challenger (East) Area, Statistical Area 017, and the Marlborough Sounds Area