

**Hon Phil Heatley**

**Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture**

16 December 2010

**Media Statement**

**Marlborough blue cod fishery to reopen**

Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Phil Heatley has announced that the Marlborough Sounds recreational blue cod fishery will reopen on 1 April 2011.

Mr Heatley says he is very pleased that following a comprehensive process involving the hard work of the Marlborough Sounds Blue Cod Management Group (BCMG), consultation with the Marlborough and wider community and rigorous scientific research, the Government is now in a position to take this important step with regard to this iconic blue cod fishery.

In 2011 the fishery will open on 1 April and close on 31 August. It will reopen on 20 December 2011 and then close on 31 August 2012. Thereafter the season will run from 20 December to 31 August annually.

"I always supported lifting the 2008 closure early as long as I could be assured blue cod can be fished in a sustainable way," says Mr Heatley.

"I particularly want to thank the BCMG members for their expert advice and the valuable input they provided."

"I'm confident that the management measures put in place will ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery."

Key elements of the management plan include:

- A bag limit of two blue cod per person per day.
- A limited fishing season.
- Strict fish size limits. Fish must be between 30 and 35 centimetres in length.
- They must be in a whole or gutted state; they cannot be filleted.
- The introduction of a no-take zone surrounding Maud Island.

These management measures seek not only to manage the number of fish being taken to a level that is sustainable, but also to protect spawning activity which is vital to the future of the fishery.

Steps to maintain the fishery will include ongoing monitoring and research including annual analysis of catch information reports by commercial and charter boats operators combined with independent abundance surveys every three years and amateur fishing surveys every four to five years.

Mr Heatley says it is important to realise that while the reopening announcement is being made now, the fishery remains closed over the coming summer period.

"This will give us time to put the necessary regulations in place as well as a plan to inform blue cod fishers about the new rules," he said.

Until the fishery reopens, any blue cod caught accidentally in the closed area must be returned to the sea straight away. Blue cod caught outside the closed area, but landed in the Marlborough Sounds, must be landed whole or gutted.

“These measures are designed to ensure the sustainability of blue cod for years to come and be easy for fishers to remember and Fishery Officers to enforce. I am sure that the many hundreds of recreational fishers who catch the bulk of blue cod in the Sounds understand better than anyone the value of measures designed to protect the future of blue cod fishing,” said Mr Heatley.

For information on the Marlborough blue cod fishery, go to <http://www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Recreational/Most+Popular+Species/Blue+Cod/Changes+to+Rules+for+Blue+Cod.htm>

Anyone seeing suspicious activity in Marlborough or elsewhere should call 0800 4 POACHER (0800 476 224). Penalties for breaching the closure include fines up to \$20,000 and forfeiture of boats and fishing gear.

**Media contact: Anna Woolnough 04 8179707 or 021 242 8269**