

Hon Phil Heatley

Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture



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Media Statement

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Marlborough blue cod fishery reopens

Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Phil Heatley will be in Marlborough today to celebrate the re-opening of the blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds Area (MSA). The fishery, which has re-opened 18 months ahead of schedule, will remain open until 31 August 2011, then will open seasonally from 20 December to 31 August each year. The Minister says he is delighted to participate in the re-opening of what can, once again, be a truly superb fishery.

"This is a significant day for an iconic fishery," says Mr Heatley.

"This opening has been supported by a lot of hard work and research. I need to acknowledge the efforts of the Marlborough Sounds Blue Cod Management Group (BCMG), the Ministry of Fisheries, and also the contribution of the local Marlborough community," he said.

The fishery was closed after NIWA survey results had shown blue cod in the MSA declined substantially (by an estimated average of 64 per cent) between 1995/96 and 2004. From 2004 to 2007, the population either continued to decline or remained at low levels in the inner, middle and outer parts of Queen Charlotte and Pelorus Sounds.

However, NIWA's 2007 survey showed some improvement in the adult biomass, and preliminary results from its 2010 research support this.

"While adult blue cod are showing signs of recovery in the Sounds, the BCMG suggested a cautionary approach to management when reopening the fishery," says Mr Heatley.

"New rules, including the first slot fishery to be introduced in New Zealand, will allow recreational fishers to catch and keep fish while also helping ensure blue cod populations recover to a healthy state and support a sustainable fishery for the future."

The management plan for blue cod in the MSA includes:

- Limiting recreational catch to two blue cod - between 30 and 35 centimetres in length ("slot compliant") - per person per day to protect juvenile fish, whose numbers are not

increasing as quickly, and to protect large breeding adults

- A two-hook limit to help the survival of non slot compliant fish and allow them to be returned to the water in alive
- A requirement that blue cod must be landed in a whole or gutted state to allow Fishery Officers to accurately monitor compliance with size limits
- A recreational fishing closure around Maud Island, to provide an opportunity to monitor changes in the abundance and population structure of blue cod.

A voluntary code of practice is also in place with recommended hook sizes and styles, as well as fish handling methods, to minimise release mortality.

"I intend to reconsider the regulations at the end of the next season. The Ministry will analyse how the rules are operating to see if they are working as intended and if any improvements can be made," said Mr Heatley.

Fishery Officers will be out and about making sure fishers are aware of and understand the new rules. Anyone seeing suspicious activity in Marlborough or elsewhere should call 0800 4 POACHER (0800 476 224).

For information on the Marlborough blue cod fishery, go to the [Blue Cod section](#) on the Ministry of Fisheries website.

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