

**3 July 2008**

**Media Statement**

**EMBARGOED TILL NOON, Thursday 3 July 2008**

**Blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds**

The blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds is to be closed for the next four years to protect the long-term future of the fishery, Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton announced today.

Jim Anderton said strong measures are needed to care for the blue cod fishery in the Sounds because the stock is in serious trouble. There has been an average decline across Marlborough of 57% of juvenile blue cod from 2004, with the inner Queen Charlotte Sound reporting no blue cod at all.

Jim Anderton said the four-year closure would allow time for stock to recover while the community made choices about the long term management of blue cod in the Sounds.

The closure will come into effect on 1 October 2008 and will expire on 1 October 2012. It will be illegal for recreational fishers to take blue cod caught within the enclosed Marlborough Sounds Area. This includes all 'enclosed waters' of Pelorus, Kenepuru, Queen Charlotte Sounds and Tory Channel.

Fishing for other species within the Sounds will still be allowed but blue cod caught unintentionally must be returned to the water immediately.

"People remember the large numbers of blue cod that could be caught in years gone by, but that is no longer the case. The Marlborough Sounds blue cod fishery is in serious decline," Jim Anderton said.

The Fisheries Ministry received over a thousand submissions about measures needed to protect and rebuild the blue cod fishery.

"This number of submissions shows the importance of blue cod fishing to the people of the Nelson/Marlborough region. There has not been universal agreement over what measures to take, although the majority of submissions supported further action to protect the future of this fishery, with most supporting closed areas.

"I have taken on board the community's views and concerns and we have altered the measures that were first proposed to take them into account."

Jim Anderton said the ministry has been working closely with commercial fishers in the area, who have agreed to continue the existing agreement not to fish in the enclosed Sounds while the closure is in force.

"This will be monitored closely and I will take further action if it is necessary."

Recreational fishing effort in the sounds will continue to increase in the future as the area becomes increasingly popular for fishers both within and outside the region.

New developments include an additional 500 new berths planned for the Picton and Waikawa marinas, as well as new baches being built around the Sounds. Boat trailer registrations in Nelson/Marlborough and Canterbury have increased by 40% over the last decade. New boats are also becoming more efficient by using sophisticated equipment to find the fish including GPS and fish finders.

As well, significant numbers of fishermen cross Cook Strait from Wellington and Mana to fish in the Marlborough Sounds.

“This means ever increasing pressure on blue cod stocks that are already in trouble,” Jim Anderton said.

The best available information shows that Marlborough Sounds blue cod has been in decline since the 1990s. Several measures have been put in place to address the problem. Most recently, in 2003 the daily bag limit was reduced to three blue cod per person and the minimum legal size for the Sounds area increased.

“Unfortunately, none of these measures have worked and the decline in blue cod numbers has continued. This leaves me in the position of having to take strong action or risk not having a blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds at all.”

The blue cod fishery in the Tory channel is not in as much trouble as elsewhere, but it has been included in the closure to avoid being brought rapidly to the same state as the rest of the Sounds, because of the increased pressure it would come under if it was excluded from this closure.

A high resolution map of the closed area is available on the Ministry of Fisheries website [www.fish.govt.nz](http://www.fish.govt.nz).

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## **Background**

Recreational fishers catch the most blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds.

The latest research shows that recreational fishers take around 150 tonnes of blue cod a year.

The Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) is 70 tonnes - commercial fishers take around 15 tonnes from the outer Marlborough Sounds area and voluntarily do not fish in the enclosed Sounds.

Results from surveys of blue cod numbers undertaken by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) shows that blue cod numbers in the inner and middle Marlborough Sounds are low and dropping.

There was an average decline across Marlborough of 57% of juvenile blue cod from 2004, with the inner Queen Charlotte Sound reporting no blue cod at all.

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