



New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Environment Committee
Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Taiao

54th Parliament
April 2025

Petition of Hauraki Gulf Alliance: Ban mobile bottom-contact fishing methods in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Catherine Wedd, Chairperson

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Petition of Hauraki Gulf Alliance

Recommendation

The Environment Committee has considered the petition of Hauraki Gulf Alliance—Ban mobile bottom-contact fishing methods in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request to ban bottom-contact fishing

The petition was presented to the House on 27 June 2023. It requests:

That the House of Representatives ban all forms of mobile bottom-contact fishing including bottom trawling, scallop dredging, and Danish seining in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park; and note that 36,589 people have signed four similar online petitions to this effect.

Submissions received

We received a written submission from the Hauraki Gulf Alliance. The Hauraki Gulf Alliance is a group of 103 member organisations, businesses, and individuals. It was established in 2021 to oppose the continued use of mobile bottom-contact fishing methods, including bottom trawling, scallop dredging, and Danish seining, in the Hauraki Gulf.

We held a hearing in which we heard from representatives of LegaSea and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) New Zealand. Both organisations are members of the Hauraki Gulf Alliance.

We also received a written submission and heard oral evidence jointly from the Ministry for Primary Industries, specifically Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ), and the Department of Conservation (DOC). Both agencies have marine management and protection responsibilities under the Government strategy *Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan (Revitalising the Gulf)*.

The petitioner's request

Hauraki Gulf Alliance said that changes to fisheries management in the Gulf are required from an environmental, social, and economic perspective. It made three recommendations: prohibit mobile bottom-contact fishing methods, authorise innovators to use lower impact fishing techniques, and encourage the establishment of small-scale local fisheries.

Guiding strategies, plans, and legislation

There are several guiding documents about preserving marine ecosystems and supporting sustainable fisheries in the Hauraki Gulf. FNZ said that the work relating to the Hauraki Gulf has been “consistently collaborative”.

Sea Change Plan

The *Sea Change—Te Timu Tai Pari—Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan* (the Sea Change Plan) was published in April 2017.¹ The petitioner submitted that stakeholders and organisations were involved in the plan, and that they all wanted the Hauraki Gulf to be an abundant, eco-diverse environment for everyone to enjoy. In our hearing, we heard that the Sea Change Plan's objective is to transition, within a defined time period, from mobile bottom-contact fishing methods to new methods that cause less damage to the seafloor and reduce the amount of unwanted bycatch. The petitioner said that stakeholders across a range of sectors agreed that this would be the best way forward.

Revitalising the Gulf strategy

In 2021, the Government produced a strategy responding to the Sea Change Plan. *Revitalising the Gulf* sets out an integrated approach to protecting and managing the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.² FNZ and DOC told us that a ministerial advisory committee and previous Ministers considered completely transitioning from the use of bottom trawling and Danish seining in the Gulf, as recommended in the Sea Change Plan. However, the strategy allows trawling in defined areas.

FNZ and DOC submitted that allowing trawling in specified areas could protect benthic biodiversity and benefit the ecosystem, while minimising the potential effects of a complete ban. Areas of the Gulf in which the water is deeper than 200 metres were not eligible to be trawl corridors. FNZ and DOC said that the use of bottom-contact fishing methods in deeper areas would need to be assessed separately so that deep-water fisheries stakeholders were represented.

Consultation on trawl corridors

In August 2023, FNZ released a public discussion document about four options for bottom fishing access zones (BFAZ) in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.³ Retaining the status quo or completely banning bottom-contact fishing methods were not options.

The proposed options for the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park are:

- Option 1—close 74.1 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to Danish seine, close 77.1 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to trawl fishing methods, and establish 6 BFAZ.
- Option 2—close 79.4 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to Danish seine, close 82.4 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to trawl fishing methods, and establish 5 BFAZ.
- Option 3—close 86.6 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to Danish seine, close 88.5 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to trawl fishing methods, and establish 4 BFAZ.

¹ Read the [Sea Change: Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan](#).

² Read the [Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan](#) strategy.

³ [Read the discussion document here](#).

- Option 4—close 87.3 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to Danish seine, close 89.2 percent of the areas that are shallower than 200m to trawl fishing methods, and establish 4 BFAZ.

The petitioner told us that its request had not been addressed because there was no option that completely bans bottom-contact fishing methods. We asked whether the petitioner believes BFAZs could be a starting point. The Hauraki Gulf Alliance commented that the four options are based on where most of the bottom-contact fishing already occurs, so would not reduce the amount of bottom-contact fishing. The petitioner said that the options would confine the same amount of bottom-contact fishing to a smaller area, so the effect is questionable.

FNZ disagreed with the petitioner's comments that even option four would not provide more protection than the status quo. We heard that an extensive process was carried out to determine how to protect the most important areas, while recognising that high levels of fishing activity occur in certain areas. FNZ said that option four would reduce both the areas where bottom-contact fishing could occur and the amount of catch that could be taken from those areas. However, FNZ also acknowledged the petitioner's point that this may result in more bottom-contact fishing occurring within those areas and some displacement of bottom-contact fishing out of the Hauraki Gulf.

Public consultation on the four options closed on 6 November 2023. Agencies reviewed the feedback received and provided advice to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries. The petitioner said that the Minister should respond to this advice urgently.

Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan

FNZ and DOC said that the *Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan* is a significant step towards fulfilling the fisheries management commitments set out in *Revitalising the Gulf*. The plan was finalised by the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries in August 2023.⁴ It contains actions to support a more integrated approach to managing fisheries based on the ecosystem.

When this petition was presented, the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan was in draft form. The petitioner did not support the draft Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan because it considered that the plan permitted the ongoing destruction of the benthic environment, did not propose sufficient meaningful actions to restore ecosystem function, and did not prohibit mobile bottom-contact fishing methods. The Hauraki Gulf Alliance believe that the fisheries plan must be consistent with the statutory objectives for the management of the park. The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 states that the marine park's purpose is "to recognise and protect in perpetuity the international and national significance of the land and the natural and historic resources within the Park" and "to sustain the life-supporting capacity of the soil, air, water, and ecosystems of the Gulf in the Park".

Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Bill

The Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Bill was introduced to the House on 22 August 2023.⁵ It seeks to extend two marine reserves (Te Whanganui-o-Hei | Cathedral

⁴ Read the [Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan](#) here.

⁵ [Read about the bill's progress here.](#)

Cove and Cape Rodney-Okakari Point (Goat Island)) and create 12 high protection areas (HPAs) and five seafloor protection areas (SPAs). These new marine protection areas would increase the overall protected area of the Gulf from just over six percent to approximately 18 percent. We considered this bill and reported to the House on 20 June 2024. We note that the Government intends to enact this bill and Ministers have indicated that there may be amendments.⁶

We noted that the petition was presented prior to the introduction of the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Bill. In our hearing, we asked the petitioner whether this bill would address some of their concerns. The petitioner said that while protection areas are very important, they are only one of many necessary critical interventions. It emphasised that other actions need to be progressed together because of the complexity of the ecological decline in the Gulf. FNZ said that eight workstreams are focused on prioritising the mauri (life force) of the Gulf.

We asked whether the Hauraki Gulf Alliance supports the creation of HPAs: areas in which a range of activities, including commercial and recreational fishing, are prohibited. The WWF supports HPAs. LegaSea is also in support but would like to see a more comprehensive approach to management.

Effects of bottom-contact fishing

Marine species and habitats

According to research cited by the petitioner, bottom trawling is the third biggest threat to marine habitats. In our hearing, we heard that in the Hauraki Gulf, loss of marine habitat has contributed to declines of:

- 57 percent in key fish stocks
- 67 percent of seabirds and shorebirds
- 86 percent in shark stocks
- 97 percent in whales and dolphins.

Scallop and crayfish populations in the Gulf are described as “functionally extinct”. In the 2020 State of our Gulf report, snapper and tarakihi are both described as “over fished or depleted” or as “stocks that need rebuilding”.⁷

Economic opportunities

In our hearing, we also heard about the economic effects of declining fish populations, and how it relates to the profitability of the fishing industry. The petitioner said that scallop dredging has contributed to the collapse of commercially viable scallop populations around New Zealand. The petitioner said that scallop fisheries have closed at the top of the South Island, in East Northland, and in Coromandel because of decades of over-harvest and the ongoing use of destructive fishing techniques. The petitioner noted that it was the right decision to close those fisheries, but it took away economic opportunities, including jobs. It

⁶ Media release, Significant protection for Hauraki Gulf/Tīkapa Moana.

⁷ State of our Gulf 2020, p 49.

emphasised that the health of an ecosystem directly correlates to the economic benefits it can provide.

The petitioner cited research which found that the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park generates \$5 billion every year. The commercial fishing sector's share of this is only \$30 million. The petitioner also said that only 21 percent of the fishing in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is bottom trawling. It said that this indicates that more selective fishing techniques are available and moving away from bottom trawling is "perfectly viable".

We noted the petitioner's comment that a ban would result in economic benefits and asked FNZ for further details. FNZ said there has not been specific analysis on this matter.

Invasive weeds

The petitioner said that mass infestations of two invasive species of weed were found in the Gulf in 2023. The ministry issued a controlled area notice for specific areas of the Hauraki Gulf to try to prevent the spread of *caulerpa brachypus* and *caulerpa parvifolia*. The petitioner emphasised that invasive *caulerpa* is a significant biosecurity threat to New Zealand's ecosystems because it smothers seagrass and ocean floors and suffocates benthic habitats.

The petitioner told us that mobile bottom-contact fishing methods can spread the invasive weeds. Hauraki Gulf Alliance said that once those species of weed are established in the ecosystem, it is almost impossible to remove them. It is therefore concerned that the ministry has not proposed restricting the use of the fishing methods.

FNZ and DOC acknowledged the petitioner's concern about invasive *caulerpa* species in parts of the Gulf. The agencies noted that the options for trawl corridors are in areas more than two nautical miles from the coast, predominantly in areas where the water is deeper than 40 metres, and where invasive *caulerpa* is not widely established. Biosecurity New Zealand is leading the response to invasive *caulerpa* and is considering how the weeds could affect the wider marine ecosystem, including fisheries.

Sediment plumes

Hauraki Gulf Alliance said that bottom trawling disturbs, displaces, and re-suspends vast quantities of sediment, with plumes of sediment present even several days after a single trawl. It said that this can release stored carbon. Further, re-suspended sediment turns water cloudy, making it difficult for plants to grow and for fish to detect prey or predators.

Mitigating effects of bottom-contact fishing

Lower-impact fishing techniques

The petitioner encouraged the use of lower-impact fishing techniques, such as hand-gathering. FNZ is working with the industry to innovate and improve fishing methods and gear. One of the aims of the work is to reduce the adverse effects of fishing methods and gear on the ocean floor. New regulations are being drafted that would enable commercial scallop harvesting using underwater breathing apparatus. FNZ said this would create opportunities for lower-impact fishing in areas with suitable commercial beds.

Small-scale local fisheries

The petitioner recommended encouraging the establishment of small-scale local fisheries, including whānau businesses, in regional areas. FNZ and DOC said that the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan includes several management objectives and actions for local fisheries. The plan aims to improve and increase capacity for tangata whenua and stakeholders to be involved in fisheries management.

Biodiversity benefit

We asked whether banning bottom-contact fishing methods would benefit biodiversity. DOC said that the effects of fishing depend on the habitat. Habitats that might be subject to severe effects are in areas that would be protected under the bill. Other areas have not been fished in over 20 years. DOC said research has not identified many differences between the fished and unfished areas. We heard that FNZ has commissioned NIWA to study benthic habitats in the Gulf, which is expected to provide data to inform further spatial planning there.

Public opposition

The petitioner said that the public strongly oppose bottom-contact fishing methods. It cited a recent Horizon Research poll, which indicated that 84 percent of New Zealanders who live near the Gulf support banning bottom-contact fishing methods.

Our response to the petition

We thank the Hauraki Gulf Alliance for providing an extensive written submission and discussing this matter with us. We appreciate that there is significant public interest in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park and agree that the area needs to be managed to achieve the best environmental, economic, and social outcomes.

We agree with FNZ that the approach to preserving the marine ecosystems in the Hauraki Gulf must also consider the economic effects. We consider that the tools and work streams that have been put in place will enable progress towards the goal of improving the state of the Gulf. To that end, we encourage the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries to consider the advice on trawl corridors.

In early December, we heard from DOC as part of the 2023/24 annual reviews. We discussed DOC's work programme relating to the Hauraki Gulf. We will follow up on DOC's progress in this area in the upcoming annual reviews. We will also seek an update from Fisheries New Zealand in due course.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to the Environment Committee of the 53rd Parliament on 17 August 2023.

On 6 December 2023, the petition was reinstated with the Environment Committee of the 54th Parliament. We met between 14 December 2023 and 3 April 2025 to consider it. We received written submissions on 1 August 2024 and heard oral evidence from the petitioner, the Ministry for Primary Industries, and the Department of Conservation.

Committee members

Catherine Wedd (member from 29 January and Chairperson from 30 January 2025)

Hon Scott Simpson (Chairperson and member until 29 January 2025)

Glen Bennett (until 12 March 2025)

Hon Rachel Brooking

Mike Butterick (until 29 January 2025)

Dr Hamish Campbell (until 29 January 2025)

Simon Court

Hon Marama Davidson

Ryan Hamilton (from 29 January 2025)

Grant McCallum (from 29 January 2025)

Katie Nimon

Lan Pham

Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan (from 12 March 2025)

Hūhana Lyndon and Teanau Tuiono also participated in our consideration.

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are [available on the Parliament website](#).

A recording of our hearing on 7 November 2024 can be accessed online on [the Parliament website](#).