Hauraki Gulf Forum
Tīkapa Moana
Te Moananui-ā-Toi

SUBMISSION

Review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

12 June 2026

Hauraki Gulf Forum submission: Review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

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Introduction

1. The Hauraki Gulf Forum (the Forum) thanks Fisheries New Zealand for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed *measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area*.

2. The Forum provides this submission in accordance with its statutory role to promote the integrated management and long-term protection of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park / Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi.

3. The Forum has consistently emphasised that fisheries management cannot be separated from the ecosystems that sustain them, and that restoring ecosystem health must be central to decision-making.

4. This submission is informed by the Forum's long-standing position that the Hauraki Gulf is experiencing cumulative environmental decline, including the loss of marine habitats, reduced biodiversity, and declining shellfish populations.

Preferred Option and rationale

5. The Forum supports Option 3 (with our amendments); a full intertidal closure combined with a reduced recreational daily limit of ten shellfish outside the closure area for any species without its own recreational daily limit.

6. It is our understanding that Option 3 proposes to prohibit recreational take of shellfish and invertebrates within a defined intertidal closure area, while applying a combined daily limit of ten shellfish per person for species without individual limits outside that area.

7. The Forum considers that a full intertidal closure is necessary to protect highly accessible habitats that are subject to repeated harvesting pressure and are no longer able to sustain existing levels of take.

8. Intertidal ecosystems are particularly vulnerable due to ease of access and cumulative pressure, and therefore require stronger protection than partial closure approaches.

9. Partial closures risk ongoing depletion by allowing continued take from already stressed systems and are therefore unlikely to enable meaningful recovery.

10. The reduced daily limit outside the closure is a necessary complementary measure to prevent displacement of harvesting effort into adjacent areas. Without this control, pressure is likely to shift rather than reduce, undermining the intent of the closure.

11. A full closure provides more clarity, supports compliance, and avoids the complexity and enforcement challenges associated with multiple species-based exemptions. However, we are recommending some simple amendments to Option 3, which we will outline.

12. The Forum therefore supports Option 3 as the most effective and coherent approach to enabling recovery of intertidal ecosystems alongside the following amendments.

Proposed amendments

All islands

13. The Forum recommends that the intertidal closure be extended to include all islands, rather than being limited to mainland coastlines and Waiheke Island. Limiting the closure risks displacement of harvesting pressure to other islands, particularly those that are less populated and more ecologically vulnerable. This would undermine ecological recovery and create inconsistencies in management across the Gulf.

14. Extending the closure to all islands reflects the ecological connectivity of the marine environment and supports a more integrated, ecosystem-based approach.

15. It also promotes fairness by ensuring that access to shellfish resources is not determined by whether individuals have access to boats.

Exemption for kina harvest

16. The Forum recommends a targeted exemption for kina, retaining the current daily bag limit of 150 per person.

17. The Forum considers that kina populations are currently elevated in parts of the Gulf and are contributing to ecosystem imbalance through overgrazing of kelp forests. High densities of kina have created barrens where kelp habitats are removed and ecosystem productivity is significantly reduced.

18. Kelp forests are critical habitats that support biodiversity and provide nursery areas for many fish and invertebrate species. Maintaining the ability to harvest kina therefore supports ecosystem recovery by helping to reduce grazing pressure on these habitats.

19. A prohibition on kina harvest would risk worsening this imbalance in areas where populations are already high. Retaining the current bag limit provides a practical, community-driven mechanism to assist in restoring ecological balance.

20. This approach reflects ecosystem-based management by recognising the differing ecological roles of species rather than applying uniform restrictions.

Squid harvesting

21. The Forum recommends that squid harvest be permitted within the 200m intertidal closure, subject to a reduced daily limit of five per person.

22. We consider that the objectives of the closure can be maintained while allowing limited take of squid, provided appropriate constraints are in place.

23. Allowing a low daily limit maintains recreational access to the species without undermining the intent of the closure.

24. A reduced daily limit of five provides a simple and precautionary control that is easy to understand and enforce, while remaining consistent with the overall management approach.

Seaweed harvesting

25. Seaweed is a fundamental habitat for reef species and plays a critical role in supporting ecosystem productivity, biodiversity, and habitat complexity across the intertidal and nearshore environment.

26. The Forum recommends consideration of restrictions on the harvest of seaweed within the closure area.

27. Healthy seaweed and kelp systems underpin marine food webs, providing shelter and food for a wide range of species and contributing to the resilience of coastal ecosystems.

28. The decline of kelp habitats, including through overgrazing by kina in parts of the Gulf, highlights the importance of protecting these foundational species to support ecosystem recovery.

29. The removal of seaweed can reduce habitat structure, disrupt ecological processes, and limit the capacity of these systems to recover.

30. Protecting seaweed habitats would reinforce efforts to restore kelp forests, support biodiversity outcomes, and strengthen the overall ecological objectives of the proposed intertidal closure.

Review of the intertidal closure (within 5 years)

31. The Forum recommends that the effectiveness of the intertidal closure and associated measures be formally reviewed within five years of implementation.

32. The closure represents a significant intervention intended to reduce pressure and enable recovery of intertidal ecosystems. A review is necessary to determine whether these measures are delivering measurable improvements in species abundance, size, and diversity. It should also assess whether harvesting effort has been displaced and whether additional measures are required.

33. The Forum considers that adaptive management is essential given the complexity and variability of marine ecosystems.

34. A defined review period strengthens accountability, transparency, and confidence that management settings will be refined based on evidence. A review within a five-year timeframe provides sufficient opportunity to observe early ecological responses while maintaining responsiveness to emerging information.

Education, awareness, monitoring, compliance and reporting

35. The Forum emphasises that regulatory change alone will not be sufficient to achieve the intended ecological outcomes without strong supporting measures for education, awareness, compliance, and monitoring.

36. Effective implementation of the proposed closure will depend on public understanding of both the rules and the rationale behind them. We believe clear communication, targeted education campaigns, and visible signage at key access points will be critical to supporting behaviour change and building community support.

37. Supporting voluntary compliance is particularly important in intertidal environments, where enforcement presence may be limited and where rules rely heavily on user awareness and cooperation. We therefore support the development of complementary education and outreach initiatives that explain the role of intertidal ecosystems, the reasons for the closure, and the expected long-term benefits.

38. In addition to education, the Forum emphasises the importance of compliance support through effective enforcement, mana whenua and community partnerships, and accessible reporting mechanisms.

39. The Forum considers that monitoring and reporting frameworks should be established alongside implementation to track both ecological and social outcomes. This includes monitoring changes in species abundance and diversity, as well as patterns of harvesting effort and compliance behaviour.

40. Transparent reporting of results will be important to demonstrate progress, build public confidence, and inform adaptive management over time. We strongly support an integrated approach where regulation, education, compliance, and monitoring work together to achieve sustained ecosystem recovery.

Upholding cultural values and customary fishing rights

41. The Forum recognises the importance of customary take and the exercise of tangata whenua rights and responsibilities in relation to fisheries. This submission is provided on the basis that customary take continues to be recognised and provided for under existing legislative frameworks.

Concluding remarks

42. The Forum supports Option 3 as the most effective approach provided by the Ministry to reducing harvest pressure and enabling ecological recovery in intertidal environments.

43. The Forum recommends strengthening this option through extension to all islands, a targeted exemption for kina harvest, provision for squid harvesting, and consideration of seaweed protections.

44. The Forum emphasises that the success of these measures will depend not only on regulatory settings, but on effective implementation supported by education, awareness, compliance, and monitoring.

45. Clear communication, community engagement, and visible compliance support will be critical to building understanding and encouraging behaviour change across the region.

46. Monitoring and transparent reporting will also be essential to demonstrate progress, build public confidence, and inform adaptive management over time.

47. We therefore recommend embedding a formal review process, alongside strong supporting measures, to ensure that the closure remains effective and responsive to both ecological outcomes and community use.

48. The Forum reiterates that restoring ecosystem health is fundamental to sustaining fisheries, cultural values, and community wellbeing across the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

About the Hauraki Gulf Forum

The Hauraki Gulf Forum is a statutory governance board established under the *Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000* to promote the conservation and management of the natural, historic, and physical resources of the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and catchments, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people and communities of the Hauraki Gulf and New Zealand.

The Forum consists of representatives from tangata whenua of the Hauraki Gulf and its islands; the Ministers of Conservation, Oceans and Fisheries and Māori Development; and elected members appointed by the Auckland Council, Hauraki District Council, Matamata-Piako District Council, Thames-Coromandel District Council, Waikato District Council and Waikato Regional Council.

The Forum is required to present triennial reports regarding the state of the environment of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. More information on the Forum and the Marine Park is available at www.haurakigulfforum.org.nz

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is New Zealand's first marine park, established by the *Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act* in February 2000. At 1.2 million hectares (20 times the size of Lake Taupō) it stretches from Te Arai in the north to Waihi in the south and includes the Waitematā Harbour, Gulf Islands, Firth of Thames and the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. The Park is the seabird capital of the world, and a whale superhighway, but as successive State of the Hauraki Gulf reports have shown, it is a shadow of its former self.