Hon Shane Jones

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries
Minister for Regional Development
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B25-0165

Tēnā koe

Changes to fisheries sustainability measures for rock lobster stocks as part of the 2025 April sustainability round

I write to inform you of the decisions I have made on sustainability measures as part of the 2025 April sustainability round.

This includes decisions on the Total Allowable Catch settings for rock lobster in Otago (CRA 7) and for rock lobster in the Hauraki Gulf, Bay of Plenty and Coromandel (CRA 2), and a decision on a spatial closure for the CRA 2 fishery. Attached to this letter are my decisions along with a brief rationale for each of the changes I have made.

I would like to thank tangata whenua, stakeholders, and members of the public who provided their views on these fisheries. Your feedback is valuable in helping to inform my decisions. In making my decisions, I have also considered advice from Fisheries New Zealand, and my obligations under the Fisheries Act 1996.

I understand there is particular interest in the decisions for CRA 2 given the fishery's significant cultural and economic value, and its importance with respect to the wider environment. I have based my decisions on the best available information, noting I am expecting some further information in June this year relating to urchin barrens. Following those results, I have asked that Fisheries New Zealand provide me with further advice.

The changes I have decided will come into effect on 1 April.

The decision documents that informed my decisions are available on the Fisheries New Zealand website here: https://www.mpi.govt.nz/consultations/review-of-sustainability-measures-for-fisheries-april-2025-round/

Nāku noa, nā

Hon Shane Jones
Minister for Oceans and Fisheries

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Summary report on decisions for the 2025 April sustainability round

Spiny rock lobster / Kōura papatea

CRA 7 – Otago

I have decided to apply a small adjustment to the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and allowance for other sources of mortality in CRA 7, while retaining the other allowances and Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) as below.

TAC	TACC	Allowances		
		Customary Māori	Recreational	Other mortality caused by fishing
137.5 (á 3)	111.5	10	5	11 (á 3)

In making my decision, I have carefully considered the available information and feedback received during the consultation process.

I note that there is uncertainty regarding the abundance of urchins in parts of CRA 7 and the risks of urchin barren formation, and these risks may be elevated due to recent marine heatwaves around the Otago Peninsula. While these risks remain uncertain, I consider maintaining the current TACC to be appropriate, noting that higher stock biomass will provide greater resilience to potential impacts.

I understand that this decision does not align with the management procedure which recommended an increase to the TACC for the upcoming fishing year.

I want to make it clear that I believe the management procedure remains a useful tool and should continue to be considered in the future management of the stock, helping to guide reviews of the TAC and TACC. However, at this time I believe a cautious approach is appropriate, and as such, have decided not to increase the TACC.

More information on CRA 7 is due to become available later this year, including updated catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) data that can be used to confirm whether or not biomass has increased and to derive new management procedure recommendations. A further review of the management settings will be considered at that time.

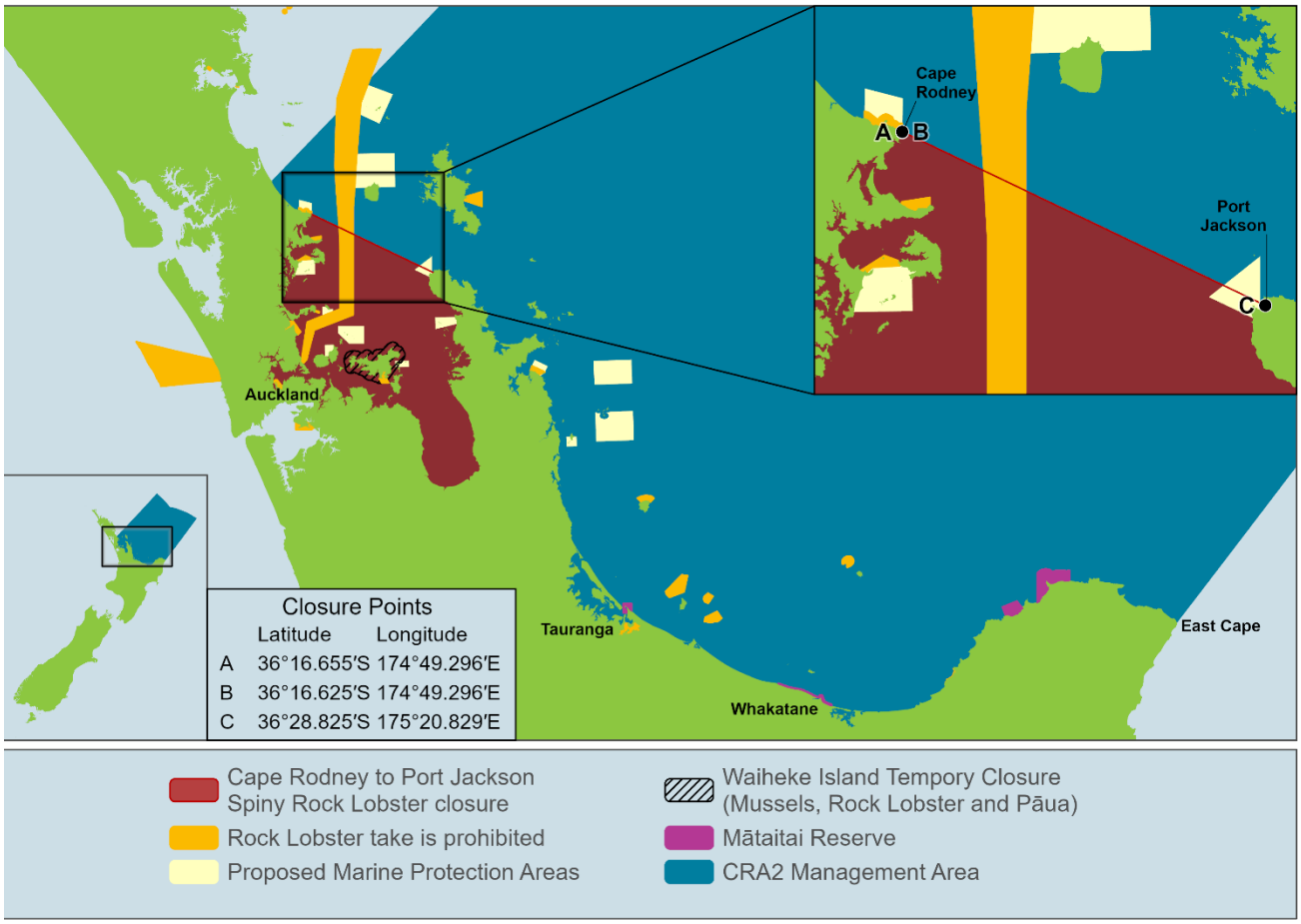
Spiny rock lobster / Kōura papatea

CRA 2 – Hauraki Gulf, Coromandel, Bay of Plenty

I have decided to retain the catch limits and allowances for CRA 2 as below:

TAC	TACC	Allowances		
		Customary Māori	Recreational	Other mortality caused by fishing
173	80	16.5	34	42.5

I have also decided to close the inner Hauraki Gulf to commercial and recreational spiny rock lobster fishing. This encompasses waters south of a straight line that extends from the southern boundary of the Cape Rodney-Okakari Point Marine Reserve to Port Jackson Bay, top of the Coromandel Peninsula, as illustrated below:



The CRA 2 fishery is highly valued by customary, recreational, and commercial fishers, due both to its close proximity to large population centres and its export value. Since being subject to a rebuild in 2018, the stock biomass has increased significantly with the most recent rapid assessment update[1] estimating vulnerable biomass[2] to be 154 percent of the interim management target (B_R) and that this will continue to increase under current catch settings. However, this increase in biomass has not been uniform across CRA 2, with both anecdotal reports and peer-reviewed scientific studies suggesting localised depletion of rock lobster abundance in specific areas of CRA 2, notably locations within the Hauraki Gulf.

In making my decisions I have to consider the adverse effects of fishing on the marine environment. Urchin predators, including (but not solely) rock lobsters, when present at sufficient abundance and size structure, can have a significant role in mitigating urchin barrens. While I acknowledge there may be other factors at play in the proliferation of urchin barrens at a national level (such as climate change and other human induced impacts), there is an established problem in North-East New Zealand (including CRA 2) and the best available information shows there is an inverse relationship between rock lobster abundance and the extent of urchin barrens.

[1] Rapid update assessments differ from full stock assessments. They repeat the previous base case stock assessment model(s) with all the same model settings and assumptions, only updating inputs (for example, additional years of catch, catch rate data, length frequencies, and tag-recapture data). Full stock assessments are far more extensive, as they involve a full review of all the data offered to the model and of the model itself, rather than an update of previously used data. Full updates are generally carried out every five years. Having rapid updates carried out between these full assessments provides more regular information to support responsive management.

[2] Vulnerable biomass refers to that portion of a stock's biomass that is available to fisheries, such as, legally harvestable adult rock lobsters. Also called exploitable biomass or recruited biomass. For rock lobsters this is limited to male and female fish above the Minimum Legal Size at the beginning of the autumn-winter season, excluding berried females.

Both recreational and commercial rock lobster fishing is low in the inner Hauraki Gulf relative to the rest of CRA 2, but some rock lobster fishing is still occurring. While I acknowledge the impacts on fishers, I consider that my decision to close this area to both recreational and commercial rock lobster fishing is a necessary step. I recognise that this closure is New Zealand's first large rock lobster only fishing closure, so I have made my decision on the basis that a review, in three years' time, will be undertaken to establish whether the closure should be maintained.

I consider maintaining the status quo catch limits to be the most effective and reasonable option available to me at the present time. With CRA 2 vulnerable biomass projected to continue to increase over the next four years, I consider that this decision will go some way towards increasing both the biomass and abundance of large rock lobster, and that in turn will help to provide a greater opportunity for rock lobster to fulfil their role in the ecosystem as an important predator of urchins.

These decisions are not expected, or intended, on their own, to address the issue of urchin barrens in the Hauraki Gulf/Bay of Plenty area. An urchin barren mapping project is scheduled to be completed later this year. Following those results I have asked that Fisheries New Zealand provide me with advice on the need for additional fisheries management measures in the Hauraki Gulf/Bay of Plenty area.

I note that the upcoming CRA 2 stock assessment later in 2025 will provide an updated estimate of the CRA 2 rock lobster abundance and projections. In turn, this will inform current vulnerable biomass and setting of a biomass management target for CRA 2.