

New Zealand Hoki



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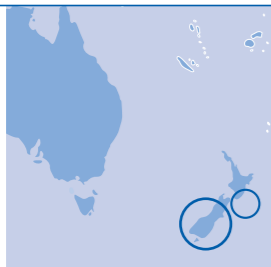
DATE CERTIFIED **March 2001; recertified October 2007**

SPECIES **Hoki (*Macruronus novaezelandiae*)**

FISHING METHOD **Midwater trawl; bottom trawl**

COUNTRY **New Zealand**

LOCATION



Separately managed as two stocks: west and south of the South Island (western stock); and in Cook Strait and on the Chatham Rise, to the east of the South Island (eastern stock)

FISHERY TONNAGE **90,000 tonnes (TAC 2008/09)**

"If you are looking for a good news story, here's a really good one," says George Clement, CEO of the DeepWater Group Ltd in New Zealand, generously providing me with a headline. "How about: Fishery Rebuilt Under MSC Custody, Stock Now Well Above Maximum Sustainable Yield?" As we talk on the phone, MFish (the Ministry of Fisheries there) has just completed its annual assessment of both the eastern and western hoki stocks. The western stock has been below the management target in recent years due to reduced levels of recruitment – the numbers of young entering a population in a given year. In the case of hoki (a chunky white fish, and one of the country's most valuable species), nobody knows why. In some years, fewer larvae and small hoki survive than in others, which has nothing to do with overfishing.

"It's like a rollercoaster," Clement says. "Hoki recruitment levels can fluctuate up to 50-fold from year to year. Between 1991 and 1994, recruitment into the western stock was above average, resulting in annual catches of 100,000 - 140,000 tonnes from 1997 to 2002. However, low levels of recruitment between 1995 and 2001 have reduced the stock size. To compensate, we have reduced catches from this stock down to 29,000 tonnes. These lower exploitation rates, coupled with improved recruitment, have enabled the stock to rebuild in size."

Stock rebuilding

It seems the strategy is paying off. Higher levels of recruitment and low catches have enabled the stock to rebuild to above the size that will produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) – the largest catch that can be taken without affecting a stock's abundance or its capacity to reproduce.

There had been particular concern about the western stock, which in 2007 was running well below the required MSY figure. The 2009 stock assessment estimates that both stocks are now above the size that will provide for maximum sustainable yields.

One key element in the success story has been the stewardship of the MSC. Among the conditions of the 2007 recertification was that the industry implement a stock rebuilding plan, to be updated annually if recovery lagged behind forecasts. It also

required management objectives, outlined in the New Zealand government's existing recovery plan, to be recorded in more detail.

It is said, MSC certification has encouraged better documentation of processes. Clement agrees this is the main bonus, but there have been others: "MSC certification also required that we undertake an Environmental Risk Assessment of the fishery with participation from stakeholders. We see that as a beneficial step."

Reduced seabird death

Another condition of recertification required the fishery to reduce the risk of injury or deaths to seabirds by managing discards of offal (fish waste) from vessels. "All hoki trawlers now have individual Vessel Management Plans," says Clement, "which prescribe agreed offal management procedures. The sole objective is to reduce the risks of injury or death to foraging seabirds." Since 2001, the number of impacts has fallen from 8.73 seabirds per 100 tows to 1.32 per 100 tows, due to a range of regulatory and voluntary measures.

Reducing impact on seabed

In Clement's view, the MSC strengthens and systemises intentions that are already there. The creation of Benthic Protection Areas (BPAs) is another excellent example. The MSC certification and surveillance programme identified interactions between trawling and seabed habitats as an area needing further management consideration. In 2007, the New Zealand Government introduced BPA closures, which exclude trawling and dredging across 30 per cent of its Exclusive Economic Zone, and provided legal protection to a wide range of representative and pristine benthic habitats – an initiative proposed by the seafood industry. This is the largest assemblage of marine protected areas in the world – focused on maintaining unspoilt deepwater marine benthic biodiversity.

"I can't say this was a result of the MSC certification of hoki alone," says Clement, "but it shows there are parallel lines of thinking. We and the MSC are doing the same thing, working hand-in-hand on long-term, sustainable solutions. We are producing food, but looking after the fishing resource and the ocean habitats at the same time."

“ The New Zealand hoki fishery is the largest fishery in New Zealand. We supply clients across Europe, the Americas and Asia with MSC certified sustainable hoki. MSC certification of the New Zealand hoki fishery has confirmed for us both the need and the benefit for our long-term commitment to sustainable seafood supplies ”

Eric Barratt, Managing Director, Sanford Ltd Sustainable Seafood



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