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# Freediving New Zealand Newsletter

## Number 56 - July 2008



### **Coming & Going**

If you had hopes that winter's blasts were not going to upset your idyllic spearfishing conditions the last two weeks will have changed that! Even as we put this newsletter together, parts of the South Island have snow falling at sea level while in the North Island a dumping is promised in places down to 300m with temperatures dropping to minus or single digit figures. The Bay of Islands sometimes dubbed the "the winterless North" is enjoying morning frosts. Warmer spots beckon! Now about global warming....!

It is good time to take stock of what has been happening in diving and spearfishing related areas and for a change of topic we give the gastronomically inclined amongst you the chance to find out more about and comment on the collection of scallops. Northland divers are specially asked for their views on the scallop area on the west coast, North Cape to Tirau Point.

### **Tahiti Spearfishing Champs 25-28 October, 07**

No one has contacted the FDNZ Committee as requested in the last newsletter to indicate their interest/availability to compete in the event.

### **New Zealand Underwater Annual General Meeting**

The meeting of our parent body was held in Auckland on the second weekend in June. Delegates who were few in number tried to grapple further with the problems NZU has to overcome with its identity. How successful that will be remains to be seen. The Executive now has a new President in Ray Dolman who was a co-opted Exec member last year, a returned Exec member Robert Feist, both of whom are Underwater Hockey stalwarts, and new Executive Member, Bruce Carter who is an NZU staff member. The previous President Lynn Taylor was defeated while the other then current Executive member David Scott withdrew his nomination for continuance. Thanks to Clubs Mercury Bay and Port Valley for getting their proxy votes in. Your FDNZ Committee were

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all present at the Meeting with the only other predominantly spearfishing club present, Open Oceans being represented by Darren Shields.

The change in the Presidency was not unexpected; members will be aware of the power struggle that has been going on there for quite some time. Underwater Hockey clubs were fully represented by proxy votes, were all financial and eligible to have their votes counted. Those clubs have grown to outnumber all other financial underwater clubs! That will come as a surprise to many NZU members particularly those who have membership in clubs with nearly 100 or more members. But large diving clubs do not necessarily have a regular commitment of involvement by members to the same extent as an Underwater Hockey Club whose members participate regularly in teams. Indeed, without that participation, an underwater hockey team could not continue to be competitive.

Of particular note for those with a spearfishing interest were the comments made about the spearing of tuna off the South Island's west coast. There was criticism by some NZU members of the practice, a) because spearing fish is frowned upon by them and b) in view of the unknown quantity of fish available. The meeting was told how comments by divers who had speared and lost such fish accounted for at least 15 fish that would probably not survive. Such assertions tossed out in a gathering are good fodder for those who oppose spearfishing. It brought to mind the WW II statement, "Careless talk costs lives." In this case, divers who embellish a story can result in effectively shooting themselves and others in the proverbial foot. Putting the catch by divers in perspective is the statement in the Recreational Fishing Council's weekly newsletter 'Nibbles' on the 23/4/07. "Last year in Greymouth more than 2.3 tons of Bluefin were weighed in by recreational fishers inside a week and that week largely consisted of bad weather." There were 5 tuna speared and landed on the South Island west coast last season. The number lost is a guess. What we do know is that these fish are reconditioning themselves in our waters before heading back to more tropical areas where they are commercially caught in large numbers.

### **Australian National Spearfishing Competition Rules**

These updated Rules will be of interest to our New Zealand members who sometimes compete in Australia. All credit to the Australian Spearfishing Commission for the good job it has done in re-writing their competition rules so as to avoid any future kerfuffle when recognizing the success of overseas competitors. You can check out their interesting website at [www.auf.com.au/](http://www.auf.com.au/)

The new relevant section of their Rules will have a ring of familiarity to NZ competitors.

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Eligibility & Visiting/Overseas Competitors

- 1.3.3 Individuals of teams from other countries may be permitted to compete provided they are affiliated to CMAS and make application to the CD and pay any relevant fees.
- 1.3.4 All perpetual trophies won by competitors shall not leave Australia, however the winner's names will be recorded on them. They will also be entitled to any prizes offered for that category.

### **Mercury Bay Open 2007**

At last! A Queen's birthday weekend with weather and water conditions that favoured competitors and the Mercury Bay Club. The Club's members deserve a pat on the back for the way in which they persist with this competition in spite of sometimes difficult winter conditions. But the large number of competitors (50) turning out for this year's event vindicated their persistence. The Club has forwarded \$500 Inter Pacific levies to the FDNZ Treasurer as well as \$200 from the generosity of Kieran Andrews who having won a voucher donated the money to the Inter Pacific fund. (*\$300 has also been received from February's North Island Champs.*)

Thanks to Pat Swanson for taking the time to write the following more personalized report and to Ron Bakker for the results we have abbreviated and show below.

"For weeks it had been undiveable in the 'Naki, I was hanging out for a splash in something other than brown mud! At last, Queen's Birthday rolled around, a compulsory fixture on my diving calendar – The Mercury Bay Open.

Most years it has been very much an end of season comp. This year diving conditions had continued to be great throughout May. The forecast was good for Sunday. I had been doing laps at my local pool to ease the suffering on the day. The day before, Colin Smith and I had been for a shore dive, getting back to shore with a great catch of Snapper, John Dory, Kingfish and Crayfish.

Sunday came, and 25 pairs arrived for the briefing at the Wharf. It was pleasing to see the number of juniors, 5 pairs. After the briefing it was into the boats and off to our area for the day, Double Island, Peter's Rock and Red Mercury. This is a great area, with a huge variety – deep

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and shallow weed edges, boulder banks, drop offs, as well as shallow bays for the less experienced.

I was diving with Colin Smith. While most pairs headed straight for Peters Rock and Red Mercury, we headed the opposite way, towards the end of Double. With an outgoing tide there should be a bit of action, and so it proved. Small Kingfish cruised through from time to time, Kahawai zoomed through the shallows, and there were Snapper everywhere – I saw one of about 5 kg right up in the wash and later, we had a school of 50 or more up to 8 kg cruising beneath us in a deep sandy gutter.

We picked up our Kahawai, Blue Maomao and Butterfish in the shallows and then headed out wider. We should have spent longer chasing Kingfish, but in the end had to do without as they were all too small. However, a bit of shredded fish in the water soon brought in the Snapper, and in a short time we had 4, all between a kilo and a kilo and a half. Out deeper we picked up some good Porae before heading down to Peters Rock to try for fish on the weed edge.

Unfortunately there wasn't much in the way of current on the edge, and so the fishing was rather sporadic. Nevertheless in a short time we had 2 John Dory though had not seen so much as a scale of a Tarakihi or a Boarfish. We also missed out on the Trevally that many of the other pairs encountered.

Still, we headed back to the boat knowing we had 16 fish, which should see us up there in the scoring. We had enjoyed great visibility and saw plenty of fish. We bemoaned the lack of a Kingfish however, knowing that the lack of weight could prove decisive.

And so it proved. Dwane Herbert and Julian Hansford won with 16 fish also, but their Kingfish providing the weight to boost their score. Colin and I were second and Peter Herbert and Ian Warnock third with 15 fish – a Mercury Bay Club clean sweep.

Thanks to all the sponsors, in particular Seaquel Wetsuits and Ronsseacorner for providing the prizes. Once again a great event, and well worth the 6 hour drive from New Plymouth." Pat Swanson

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<b>Rank</b>	<b>Open Competition Teams</b>	<b>Fish</b>	<b>Points</b>
1	Dwane Herbert/Julian Hansford	16	1867
2	Pat Swanson/Colin Smith	16	1797
3	Ian Warnock/Peter Herbert	15	1740
4	John Anderson/Blair Herbert	14	1647
5	Gary Conway/Spencer Hall	13	1536
6	Kieran Andrews/Nick Sanderson	12	1396
7	Ron Bakker/Anthony Broadhead	11	1302
8	Phil Clow/Peter Quilter	11	1230
9	Sam Gould/Peter Hutchings	10	1202
10	James Wech/Peter Vander Horst	10	1118
11	Josh Foot/Dani Foot	10	1080
12	James Kirkaldy/Simon Jones	8	930
13	Paul Spence/John Ross	8	900
14	Johnny Cleland/Richard Cleland	7	887
15	Matt Crockett/Donovan Gibbs	8	865

**Junior Results**

1	Sam Bottema/Arran Knight	11	1242
2	Robbie Coman/Karl Bottema	9	1027

**Coromandel Scallop Fishery: Draft Fisheries Plan**

We recently received this draft fisheries plan for comment. It has gone out to commercial, customary, and recreational fishers as well as environmental and other community groups. When we last asked for comment from you on the proposed changes to the seasons in which scallops could be taken, we received good feedback that was subsequently forwarded as a Freediving NZ submission. Recent comment from Mfish is that they had not previously thought of freedivers as significant collectors of scallops. Why, they did not say. Perhaps they are not aware that many of you collect them from the same depths that scuba divers are working. But we thought a summary

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of what ‘goes on in the background’ by way of developing and protecting a fishery that we can be inclined to take for granted, may help us all to value what we do have.

In respect of the Coromandel fishery, it is an area that extends from Cape Rodney (north of Auckland) throughout the Hauraki Gulf and down the east coast to Town Point (south of Papamoa.) So far, Mfish and various stakeholders have worked on steps to develop the plan for the area. We include some of that here with the approval of the Inshore Fisheries Manager in Auckland. For those of you who want to read the full document, (and there is much more of it) go to the Ministry of Fisheries web site [www.fish.govt.nz](http://www.fish.govt.nz) and look up Coromandel Scallop Fishery Draft Plan. We hope that some of you again take the time to comment on this Plan.

### **Fishery context**

Scallops usually live in soft sediments on the sea floor. Although suitable scallop habitat occurs over much of the Coromandel Scallop Quota Management Area, scallop distribution is patchy. Juvenile and adult scallops are filter feeders that feed on microscopic particles called plankton in the water column. Availability of plankton in the water is very important to early survival of larval scallops. At different stages of their life cycle, scallops are a food source for a variety of animals. Young scallops provide food for larval fish, and later hermit crabs and whelks. Larger scallops are eaten by starfish, octopus, and rock lobster. Juvenile scallops are also vulnerable to snapper predation, but this is likely to decline as the scallop increases in size and shell thickness.

Scallops have a number of biological characteristics that can contribute to marked fluctuations in population size from year to year. Such fluctuations are possible even if no fishing occurs (although the pattern of fishing effort is thought to contribute to how the population responds to such periods of low biomass – i.e. if it recovers quickly or slowly).

Most scallops are sexually mature at about 60 mm shell width, so have at least one spawning season before reaching the take size limit (90 mm for commercial fishers in the Coromandel scallop fishery; 100 mm for recreational fishers). Both commercial and non-commercial fishing tend to be concentrated in specific areas within the fishery.

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### **Environmental considerations**

Given the natural variability of scallop populations, the trophic impacts of current harvest levels for scallops are probably low. That is, flow-on effects on the ecosystem and other organisms (that either eat scallops, or are eaten by scallops) with the removal a certain volume of scallops are considered to be low.

However, the commercial fishery, along with a small portion of the non-commercial fishery, uses dredges to harvest scallops. This method can kill scallops that are left on the seabed (called incidental mortality), and can impact on other plants and animals that live on the seabed. The Ministry is developing a 'Benthic Impact Strategy' to guide the development of standards and approaches to assessing acceptable levels of environmental impact for fishing methods that impact on the seabed.

In this fishery, some measures are already in place to help mitigate these effects, including:

- Currently, commercial dredging generally occurs in the same areas from year to year, so impacts of dredging are at present limited to those areas;
- The commercial season closes on December 21, which is before a large part of the spatfall for the season probably occurs (in late December/January);
- Studies have shown that the box dredge used is the most efficient of the options currently available for the commercial fishery.

Environmental stakeholders have noted it is difficult to develop specific environmental objectives in the absence of detailed information on the proposed standards for mitigating the impacts of fishing on the environment. When the Benthic Impact Strategy and standards have been introduced, the relevant parts of the plan will be reviewed.

### **Developing management objectives, or what we want from the scallop fishery**

One of the key areas of debate during development of the goals and objectives was in relation to the sustainability goal. There was general agreement amongst stakeholders that what they wanted was an approach that would help ensure stable harvests of scallops into the future. Other considerations included high catch rates, management of any impact by starfish or blackgill, continuing fair access to the fishery with the use of bag limits, seasons, size. The question was raised whether in years of very low scallop biomass, the existing

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TAC may pose a high level of biological risk to the stock if it were fully harvested. If that were the case it suggests the possible need for official intervention during the season, an option that is not there at the moment.

### **Strategy to ensure sustainability**

The low baseline total allowable catch (TAC) is expected to ensure sustainability in most years. The TAC is complemented by other measures, including the timing and length of the commercial season and the commercial size limit at 90mm (close to optimal for long-term yield from the fishery).

However, there is currently insufficient information about the biomass in non-commercial areas or the overall level of non-commercial harvest to assess how non-commercial harvest contributes to this objective for the stock. So surveys to assess biomass in non-commercial areas have begun.

### **Strategy to encourage compliance with fisheries regulations**

There is limited information available about the level of compliance although it is considered to be reasonably high amongst most commercial with closed areas, the size limit, and not over fishing ACE levels. A small proportion of recreational fishers significantly breach the bag and size limits. Anecdotal comments suggest there are higher levels of no-compliance amongst visitors to a region.

### **Biosecurity strategy**

Neither stakeholders nor the Ministry have a strategy to reduce the risk to the scallop population caused by outbreak of disease, or any rapid increase in predatory or competitive invertebrate species. Species like starfish, tube worm, and the organism that causes blackgill may substantially impact on the viability of the Coromandel scallop fishery (note that some of these species are native rather than exotic species so may technically not constitute a 'biosecurity' threat). Invertebrate species such as starfish and tubeworm naturally have highly variable population abundance cycles, probably driven by environmental or climatic factors.

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### **Strategy to enable utilisation**

The process for the pre season biomass survey is well established, occurring in May each year. This survey provides current annual yield (CAY) estimates for the beds that are surveyed (the main commercial beds) Several CAY estimates are made, including an estimate that takes into account the impact of the fishing method on subsequent recruitment success. Such information helps if changes need to be made for a new season that will have an impact on commercial and amateur daily bag limits.

### **Strategy to enable customary use of scallops**

Factors important for utilisation for the customary sector include:

- Tikanga and kawa regulate harvest;
- Historical measures of catch effort are used to regulate harvest;
- Predictors such as seasonal cues are used;
- Customary purposes are met (tangi and hui; papakāinga use; tribal obligations – manaaki);
- Mahinga mātaitai (harvest sites) are identified

Further development of the regulations is required to better meet customary needs. Collection of scallops for hui/tangi (more than the amateur daily bag limit of 20 scallops) is permitted using a permit under Regulation 27A of the amateur fishing regulations, or regulation 11 of the Kaimoana Regulations. Kaitiaki can issue permits to meet customary purposes and seven applications have been notified within the Coromandel scallop fishery area as of the end of 2006. Some areas have particular significance for customary fishing, based on the special associations with that area and need to be further identified. For example, kaimoana (seafood) from a specific place may be used to mark rites of passage, such as death, birth, naming ceremonies, and training. More discussion needs to occur about what forms of management would be appropriate for these areas.

### **Monitoring & Review of the Plan**

A 2 year operational plan is included with this draft fisheries plan. Formal consultation will occur in the latter half of 2007 on objectives for this fishery, and the associated management strategies

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to achieve those objectives. So, those “stakeholders” amongst you who enjoy the occasional collection of scallops in this fishery may want to add your comments during the formal consultation period later this year.

### **Amendment to the Recreational Scallop Fishing Season**

Stakeholders have advised Mfish that scallops in harbours on the **north-west coast** of the North Island are in poor condition at the start of the season (July 15) and are undersized at the end of it (14 February.) Mfish proposes options that (a) maintain the status quo, (b) open the recreational scallop season later, (c) close the scallop season earlier each year in that area (FMA9)

**M/fish is interested in your views on whether a shortened season would benefit the non-commercial scallop fishery and what the opening and closing dates of the season should be.**

Submissions are due by Friday 24 August. You can email direct to [tracey.steel@fish.govt.nz](mailto:tracey.steel@fish.govt.nz) or send your comments to us here at FDNZ where we will collate replies and forward them from FDNZ. However, **note that your replies via FDNZ on this matter should be sent to us within the next fortnight. The Chairman will be away during August.**

### **Inter Pacific Champs 2008**

We have received an official invitation from Hawaii to attend the next Inter Pacific Champs to be held “...in Kona on the big island from April 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 2008. Kona has the clearest water and the biggest fish at this time.” Things are said to be in the planning stage at the moment. We have confirmed with Hawaii that NZ will have both a Men’s team of 4 divers and a Women’s team of two. Hawaii has women who want to compete, and hopefully Australia will also be able to organise a team. The NZ Men’s team will be selected from a swim-off following our 2008 National Championships while the Women’s Team selection, depending on those interested, is likely to come from their National competition.

This is all good news for those who enjoy competing in warmer waters! Later this year we will call for applications for the position of Manager of the NZ Team. There could be up to 10 people who will need travel and accommodation costs and arrangements put on track. We will keep you posted.

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## **New Zealand National Spearfishing Champs 2008**

If you are wondering about your accommodation arrangements in Tauranga and Mt Maunganui during 22-27 January next years, the following web sites may help you find what you are looking for.

[www.bookabach.co.nz](http://www.bookabach.co.nz)

[www.holidayhouses.co.nz](http://www.holidayhouses.co.nz)

[www.holidayhomes.co.nz](http://www.holidayhomes.co.nz)

THIS INFORMATION IS SENT TO YOU BY FREEDIVING NEW ZEALAND,  
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*Note: the Chairman will be in Denmark and Sweden, July 30 to September 6. Enquiries during that time should be addressed to either the Secretary or Treasurer.*