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Media Release**

EDS highly critical of alarming decline in north-eastern scallop stocks

The Environmental Defence Society has released its submission on proposals for the management of north-eastern scallop stocks and has called for stronger long-term protection measures.

In the course of the latest sustainability review for wild fish stocks, Fisheries New Zealand sought feedback on three options for rebuilding the Northland and Coromandel scallop stocks after surveys showed the stock levels are critically low and at risk of widespread collapse.

“The 2021 surveys demonstrate there has been an alarming decline in the abundance and biomass of scallops in the north-eastern fisheries over the past 10-14 years,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“The reality is that, in many areas, the stocks appear to have already tipped below a critical threshold. The biomass of historically important scallop beds in the Hauraki Gulf and Spirits Bay are now only 5% and 2% of what they were when the last surveys of these areas were undertaken in 2012 and 2007.

“Our submission supports the proposal to close the scallop fisheries immediately as a minimum requirement, but calls for stronger long-term measures.

“We are particularly concerned about the lax performance of our fisheries management agency, which was supposed to be looking after this precious taonga, but has let our scallop beds decline to their current perilous state.

“We would like to commend those iwi that have laid down rāhui within the north-eastern scallop fisheries in the absence of government action.

“The generality of the Fisheries New Zealand proposal is of concern because no management targets or stock reference limits have been set for the north-eastern stocks.

“In the absence of evidence-based stock management levels, it is unclear how the recovery of scallop populations will be tracked or evaluated, and there is a risk the stocks will not be given sufficient time to recover.

“EDS has called for additional measures to ensure the stocks are not reopened prematurely.

“We are also concerned about a lack of focus on harvest methods. The science is clear that scallop dredging causes widespread and persistent degradation of shellfish beds and other biogenic habitats, with implications for entire marine ecosystems.

“In EDS’s view, there is no room for such an environmentally damaging harvest method in a 21st century fishery. We are calling for a total prohibition on the use of commercial and recreational dredges to harvest scallops.

“Our submission also flags the need for permanent area-based restrictions to protect remaining scallop beds, which will support the recovery of the north-eastern stocks.”

“Our vulnerable scallop beds are already under pressure from sedimentation and pollution. This pressure will only ramp up as the effects of climate change impact our coastal waters.

“We need to take immediate action and set strong measures if we are not to lose our north-eastern scallop beds entirely,” concluded Mr Taylor.

Read our submission [here](#).