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21 October 2022

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Review of commercial fishing sustainability measures for the Cape Brett to Mimiwhangata area, Northland

1. Introduction

This is a submission on the review of commercial fishing sustainability measures for the Cape Brett to Mimiwhangata area, Northland as set out in the Fisheries New Zealand Discussion Paper 2022/17 (Discussion Paper).

The Environmental Defence Society (EDS) is an independent not-for-profit organisation conducting interdisciplinary policy research and litigation. It was established in 1971 with the purpose of improving environmental outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand. EDS has a special interest in coastal and marine ecosystems and is currently leading research on future options for oceans system reform.

EDS is familiar with the range of complex matters that need to be addressed in fisheries management in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2018, EDS published findings from a review of the fisheries management system in a report entitled "*Voices from the sea: managing New Zealand's fisheries*".¹ The findings of the Report were informed by national and international literature reviews; an economic analysis and review of stock assessment data for some key stocks; and more than 60 interviews with people closely involved in fisheries management. More recently, EDS has submitted on a range of proposals for fisheries management.²

¹ Raewyn Peart *Voices from the Sea: Managing New Zealand's Fisheries* (EDS, Auckland, 2018)

² Copies of recent submissions prepared by EDS are available from: <https://www.eds.org.nz>

2. Submission

The Discussion Paper proposes to prohibit commercial bottom trawling and Danish seining in an area around Cape Brett and the Mimiwhangata coastline which includes reef systems. It indicates that these systems support significant benthic marine biodiversity. It also indicates that mobile bottom-contact gear is the main potential threat to this biodiversity.

The Discussion Paper presents two options: Option 1 which is to prohibit commercial bottom trawling and Danish seining on the rocky reefs and surrounding soft sediments; and Option 2 which is to prohibit those methods on the rocky reefs only.

As stated in the Discussion Paper “It is well known that fishing with mobile bottom-contact gear, such as bottom trawling, has adverse effects on benthic communities and their habitat”. On rocky reefs such methods crush living organisms and damage habitats. On soft sediments, bottom trawling can displace sediment and associated species and also suspend sediment into the water column. This can take days to settle thereby reducing the clarity of the water. When the sediment settles it can smother benthic species and impede the ability of filter feeders to obtain food.

Given the significant marine biodiversity in the area, and the potential adverse effects on it that can be caused by bottom trawling and Danish seining, EDS supports the proposal to prohibit those methods in the area.

In EDS’s view Option 1, which also protects soft sediment areas around the reef systems, is to be preferred to Option 2, as under Option 2 there is a risk that sediment resuspended from the soft sediment areas can settle on sensitive benthic communities on both the soft sediments and adjacent reef areas.

As is evident from Appendix 1 to the Discussion Paper, there are reef systems outside the area proposed for closure to bottom trawling and Danish seining. EDS submits that such restrictions should apply to all reef systems and surrounding soft sediments along the Northland coastline.

3. Conclusion

EDS supports Fisheries NZ’s efforts in seeking to provide greater protection to the Cape Brett and the Mimiwhangata coastline. Of the options presented in the Discussion Paper, Option 1 is to be preferred as it provides more effective protection for that part of the coastline. However, EDS urges Fisheries NZ to consider extending the protection to all rocky reef systems along the Northland coastline.