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Proposed temporary fisheries closure of Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) and nearby islands

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is a submission on the proposed temporary fisheries closure of Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) and nearby islands as sought by the Motairehe Marae Trust and supported by iwi trust board Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 EDS has a special interest in the marine environment and recently completed the first phase of a multi-year project looking at options for future reform of the oceans management system.¹ This included, among other things, fisheries management. In 2018, EDS led an in-depth review of the national fisheries management system and published findings in a report entitled *Voices from the Sea: Managing New Zealand's Fisheries*.² It has also sought to improve fisheries decision-making by submitting on proposals to set sustainability measures for the management of various wild fish stocks.³

¹ Greg Severinsen and others, *The Breaking Wave: Oceans Reform in Aotearoa New Zealand* (EDS, Auckland, June 2022) available from www.eds.org.nz

² Raewyn Peart, *Voices from the Sea: Managing New Zealand's Fisheries* (EDS, Auckland, 2018) available from www.eds.org.nz

³ Copies of EDS's recent submissions on a range of wild fish stocks are available from www.eds.org.nz

2. The temporary closure proposal

- 2.1 The Motairehe Marae Trust has requested a two-year minimum closure to the harvest of scallops, pāua and rock lobster within 3 nautical miles of Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island), Little Barrier Island (Te Hauturu-o-Toi), the Mokohinau Islands, Simpson Rock and Horn Rock.
- 2.2 The closure request is in response to community concerns about the decline of these species, which is thought to be at least partly due to overfishing and poor recreational and commercial fishing practices.

3. EDS's submission

- 3.1 EDS commends the Motairehe Marae Trust for taking an active role as kaitiaki over the important customary resources located in the waters around Aotea and nearby islands. It is hoped that the request will draw attention to the dire state of important marine taonga in the Hauraki Gulf. We also note that the Trust sees the rāhui as an important and pivotal first stage of an Ahu Moana programme for the area. Ahu Moana was an important part of the 2016 Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari marine spatial plan and should be supported.
- 3.2 It is clear the rock lobster, scallop and pāua stocks are severely depleted in the Hauraki Gulf and that fishing pressure needs to be removed to enable them to recover. As stated by the Motairehe Marae Trust in its closure request:

“Ahi kaa whanau, the kaitiaki of our moana, know personally that paua, tipa and koura are now out of reach for our kaumatua - and these beds are now barren.”

- 3.3 This is supported by the recent 2023 *State of the Gulf* report which states in respect of rock lobster and scallop stocks in the Hauraki Gulf:⁴

“The kōura (crayfish) population in the Marine Park has been substantially reduced. Kōura are now regarded as functionally extinct in heavily fished areas and kina barrens are expanding rapidly due to the lack of large predators.”

“Surveys conducted in 2021 found the overall tipa [scallop] biomass had decreased by 82% since the previous survey in 2012. The entire Coromandel and Northland fisheries were closed in April 2022, except for two small areas around Te- Hauturu-o-Toi and Colville Channel. Follow up surveys found that the biomass in these two remaining open areas had decrease (sic) by 37–85% within one year, and subsequently, they were also closed in December 2022. In March 2023, the Coromandel fishery was closed indefinitely.”

- 3.4 We also note that there has been no recent surveys or assessment undertaken of the Paua 1 North East Coast stock (which includes the Hauraki Gulf) despite an estimated recreational harvest of 9 tonnes.⁵
- 3.5 **For the above reasons EDS supports the temporary closure as requested.**

⁴ Hauraki Gulf Forum, 2023, *State of our Gulf 2023: At a glance*, Hauraki Gulf Forum, Auckland, at 17

⁵ Fisheries New Zealand, 2023, *Fisheries Assessment Plenary, May 2023: Stock assessments and stock status*, compiled by the Fisheries Science Team, Fisheries New Zealand, Wellington, at 1048 and 1055