# Unlocking New Zealand's Fishing Potential

*ACT will unlock New Zealand's fishing potential by rebuilding fish stocks, protecting vulnerable marine environments, and creating the conditions for better recreational and commercial fishing.*

New Zealand has some of the richest marine resources in the world. Fishing supports jobs and exports, puts food on family tables, and is part of the way millions of New Zealanders enjoy our coastline.

For many Kiwi families, catching a fish means bringing home dinner. But equally, the fish New Zealanders buy at the supermarket, order at a restaurant, or that many eat with their Friday night chips comes from people making their living at sea.

Both depend on abundant, healthy fisheries. But too often, we manage fisheries around scarcity rather than abundance. Some fisheries have been depleted. Some coastal areas have been stripped of shellfish and other marine life. In other places, large management areas can mask local problems. At the same time, blunt restrictions can punish responsible fishers without addressing the environmental harm they are supposed to prevent.

ACT's goal is to unlock the potential of our oceans by creating a state of plenty: more fish in the water, better fishing for New Zealanders, and stronger fisheries for the future.

## 01 Unlock the potential of the Hauraki Gulf

The Hauraki Gulf should be one of the best places in the world to fish. Instead, some fisheries within the Gulf have suffered serious decline.

One problem is that commercially important fish stocks within the Gulf can be managed as part of much larger fisheries areas. That can conceal local depletion.

ACT would establish a distinct fisheries management area matching the existing boundaries of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Catch settings for stocks within the Marine Park could then reflect what is actually happening within the Gulf rather than conditions across a much larger surrounding area.

Where necessary, corresponding quota management areas for key stocks would be adjusted so those stocks could be managed specifically within the new Hauraki Gulf area.

Existing quota holders would retain their proportional property rights. If someone holds 5 per cent of the quota within an existing quota management area, they would retain the same proportional entitlement when that area is divided.

What would change is the amount that could sustainably be caught within each area. Where a Hauraki Gulf stock is severely depleted, its Total Allowable Catch could be reduced to allow it to rebuild. Where stocks are healthy, fishing could continue at sustainable levels.

*ACT will establish a distinct fisheries management area matching the boundaries of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, allowing local catch settings to rebuild depleted stocks while preserving existing quota holders' proportional property rights.*

### 02 Stopping the stripping of Auckland rock pools

Rock pools and intertidal areas around Auckland have increasingly faced intensive harvesting of shellfish and other marine life.

In some easily accessible areas, repeated gathering has stripped rock pools and intertidal habitats that should be full of life. The problem is particularly visible around Auckland, but the same rules need to be capable of protecting vulnerable areas elsewhere in the country.

ACT supports recreational gathering. The answer is not to close coastlines to families who collect modest amounts for themselves. The problem is that species without their own individual daily limits can be taken in quantities that allow a relatively small number of people to strip an area.

Many popular shellfish species already have individual daily limits. Those limits should remain.

*ACT will introduce a nationwide combined recreational daily bag limit of 10 for shellfish and other covered species that do not already have their own individual daily limit, preventing the large-scale stripping of vulnerable rock pools and intertidal areas.*

### 03 Stopping the harmful collection of scallops

North Island scallop fisheries have enormous potential, but they are currently in serious trouble.

The Northland scallop fishery has been closed to commercial and recreational harvesting since 2022. The Coromandel scallop fishery, covering the Coromandel, Hauraki Gulf and western Bay of Plenty, is also closed.

Those closures provide an opportunity to rebuild the fisheries differently when they eventually reopen.

Scallop dredging is the most destructive harvesting method available in New Zealand. It physically disturbs the seabed. If scallop populations eventually recover, there is no reason to automatically return to dragging dredges across the ocean floor when more selective harvesting methods are available or can be developed.

*ACT will permanently end scallop dredging in scallop fisheries that are currently closed and enable selective harvesting technologies as stocks recover.*

### 04 Align fisheries management with fishing impacts

Not all fishing methods impose the same costs.

Bottom trawling, dredging and other high-impact methods can damage seabed habitats, generate bycatch and impose wider environmental costs. Lower-impact methods may catch the same fish while imposing substantially less damage. A market-based fisheries system should make those differences visible.

At present, the cost faced by a fishing operator does not necessarily reflect the full environmental and fisheries-management cost associated with the method they use. If one method creates significantly greater environmental damage,

research requirements or enforcement costs than another, the operator using it should face those costs rather than shifting them onto other fishers, taxpayers or the marine environment.

ACT would require Fisheries New Zealand to undertake and publish an economic assessment of the major commercial harvesting methods, including bottom trawling and dredging. It would examine the cost differential between different harvesting techniques and assess whether existing fisheries and conservation levies adequately reflect the environmental and management costs associated with each method.

Where a fishing method creates demonstrably higher costs than others, those costs should be reflected through the existing fisheries levy system. The overall levy burden would not increase. Instead, levies would be rebalanced so higher-impact methods pay a greater share and lower-impact methods a smaller share.

That would strengthen the incentive to develop and adopt lower-impact fishing technology without confiscating quota or imposing a blanket ban.

The economic assessment would be undertaken within existing fisheries-management funding.

*ACT will require Fisheries New Zealand to quantify the economic and environmental cost of high-impact fishing methods and adjust existing fisheries levies so methods creating greater costs pay a greater share of them.*

### 05 Punish those who break the rules

Fishing rules only work if the consequences for deliberately breaking them are large enough to deter offending.

Current infringement fees can be too low relative to the damage caused by serious offending. Someone taking more than their legal entitlement can strip vulnerable fisheries while facing a penalty that amounts to little more than an inconvenience.

ACT would increase fisheries infringement fees and introduce a clearer graduated structure, so the penalty reflects the seriousness of the offending.

Minor breaches should not be treated in the same way as deliberate or large-scale offending. Taking several times the legal limit, repeat offending, or conduct capable of causing substantial damage to a local fishery should attract progressively higher penalties.

Responsible fishers should not have the resource they follow the rules to protect undermined by people who regard the existing fine as an acceptable cost of offending.

*ACT will increase and stagger fisheries infringement fees so penalties reflect the seriousness of the offending and provide a genuine deterrent.*

### 06 Ensuring fisheries abundance

New Zealand's fisheries system should aim for more than having just enough fish in the water to sustain the maximum possible catch.

The Fisheries Act centres management around the level capable of producing maximum sustainable yield. But managing around that level provides less room for error when recruitment is poor, environmental conditions change, scientific estimates are uncertain, or management decisions take too long to respond.

New Zealand has seen what can happen when stocks fall well below healthy levels. East Coast tarakihi has required a long-term rebuilding programme, with published stock assessments estimating the eastern stock at only 7.7 per cent of its unfished biomass.

ACT wants fisheries managed to higher stock levels.

The first reason is abundance. New Zealand should aspire to fisheries where finding and catching fish is normal, rather than treating scarcity as an acceptable equilibrium.

The second is resilience. A larger fish population provides a buffer when spawning

is poor, environmental conditions change or scientific estimates turn out to be wrong. Instead of managing close to the line, fisheries should have enough headroom to withstand unexpected shocks.

Greater abundance also benefits both commercial and recreational fishing.

When there are more fish in the water, commercial fishers can generally catch their quota with less time, fuel and effort. Recreational fishers have better catch rates and a better chance of bringing something home.

*ACT will progressively manage important fish stocks at higher levels than the current maximum-sustainable-yield approach, creating greater abundance and a stronger margin against uncertainty and future shocks.*

**Unlocking the potential of our oceans**

New Zealand does not have to choose between fishing and conservation.

A healthy marine environment is the foundation of a successful fishing industry. Abundant fish stocks are good for commercial fishers, recreational fishers and the wider ecosystem.

ACT's approach is to protect the resource while preserving the freedom to use it.

That means rebuilding fisheries where they are depleted, protecting vulnerable habitats from genuine damage, and replacing blunt restrictions with rules focused on actual risks.

New Zealand has extraordinary natural advantages. ACT will unlock their potential so our oceans support more fish, more opportunity and better fishing for generations to come.