



Bluff oysters in hot demand as season kicks off

An Auckland restaurateur wanted 200 dozen Bluff oysters direct from processor Barnes Oysters in Invercargill.

You can't have them, said general manager Graeme Wright. He was struggling to meet demand from his regular distributors.

What if I fly down and collect them, the persistent caller asked.

Sure, you can fly down if you want but you still can't have them, Wright responded.

Such is the demand for the delicacy dredged from Foveaux Strait, the world's largest wild oyster fishery.

Customers were queued outside the Barnes factory on a bleak stretch of Invercargill's wide Spey Street last week when the season opened.

Sales were frantic.

A total of 4500 dozen were sold in one day, going straight from the openers to the shop.

The price is \$25 a dozen at source and as much as \$65 at upmarket Waiheke Island in the north.

Culpeper's in Auckland managed to secure 500 dozen and ran an all-you-can-eat promotion at \$175 a head. One diner scoffed seven dozen.

The parasite *bonamia ostreae* has destroyed the farmed oyster industry on Stewart Island and in the Marlborough Sounds but there is no evidence of it infecting the wild fishery, as was feared.

Wright, in his role for 19 years, has seen wildly varying seasonal conditions and complete closures in several years but is cautiously optimistic about the way

this season is shaping, which opened on March 1. An encouraging sign is strong oyster recruitment, the best since 2008, and low mortalities in survey tows conducted over the summer. The oysters are infected with a less virulent strain of bonamia - exitiosus - which is not harmful to humans, and is at low levels this season. Barnes Oysters, a co-operative of eight seafood companies, employs 18 openers, a loyal staff that return year after year. They include 80-year-old Errol Ryan, still going strong. A fast opener earns about \$50 an hour. Some are tradies taking a break from their regular work, others are seasonal workers and some like Errol Ryan cannot stay away. Those long-term loyalties extend to distributors who may have been dealing with the company for decades. The most celebrated was Frank Whiting in Auckland who died last year aged 101. He still drove when he was 99 and was selling oysters at 100. Despite the demand, the quota holders are determined not to over-exploit a precious resource and fish conservatively. The Total Allowable Commercial Catch is again 15 million but last year only about 10million were landed. The seasons ends on Aug 31 but most of the 11 boats in the fishery have tied up by then. A highlight of the season is the Bluff oyster festival on May 25 which has again sold out.



Barnes Oysters general manager Graeme Wright in the Invercargill factory.



Oyster openers struggling to keep up with demand.

New report shows fisheries in good condition

Nearly 97 percent of New Zealand's wild harvest in 2017 came from sustainable stocks, a new report from the Ministry for Primary Industries says. *The Status of New Zealand's Fisheries 2017*, released last week, summarises fish stocks nationwide and paints a positive picture for the industry.

Of assessed landings, 96.5 percent were made up of stocks above the 'soft limit' (a biomass level which a stock is deemed to be overfished or depleted and needs to be rebuilt if below) and 83.6 percent of assessed stocks were above the 'soft limit'.

Highlights from the report include:

- As a consequence of substantial reductions in hoki quotas over the period 2001-2007, both stocks of hoki (eastern and western) increased in size for consistently over nearly a decade, and have recently levelled off at a biomass well above their management target range
- The Puysegur sub-stock of orange roughy was assessed in 2017 and found to have fully rebuilt since its closure in 1997
- A 2015 assessment for snapper along the north and west coasts of the South Island showed that it has increased substantially in size in recent years and is now well above its biomass limits and approaching its management target
- Stock assessments for six red gurnard stocks from 2013-17 show that they are at or above their management targets in virtually all areas where they occur

To read more from the report, [click here](#)



Marine protection forum a failure

Three years on and millions of dollars later, and still no consensus from the group set up to identify areas to protect parts of the South Island coast. Representatives from the South East Marine Protection Forum handed in two plans after they could not agree to a plan for the south Canterbury and Otago coastline.

Network one is backed by the environmental and tourism sector, whilst Network two is pushed by the fishing industry and a recreational fishing representative.

- Network 1 - covers 1267 km² of the Forum region and includes 18 of the 22 coastal habitats in the Forum region, seven of 12 estuarine habitats and two biogenic habitats.
- Network 2 – covers 366 km² of the Forum region, includes 10 of the 22 coastal habitats, no estuarine habitats and two biogenic habitats.

The [314-page report](#) has been handed to Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash and Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage who will review it and call for public submissions.

Fishing industry representative on the forum and Otago rock lobster industry association chief executive Simon Gilmour told Radio NZ the process was flawed from the beginning.

"We got railroaded into this process of identifying the habitats, and putting a marine reserve around them, and in the end we're not achieving anything," Gilmour said.

A representative from Forest and Bird agreed the overall process was a failure. Gilmour was part of a group who asked the Nash to halt the release of the report as it did not acknowledge other types of protections, such as mataitais, that are already in place.

Any recommendations made in the report that are accepted by the Government will be required to go through the appropriate statutory processes and associated opportunities for further consultation and public input before implementation.

News

A Northland commercial fisherman has been fined a total of \$6,000 for under-reporting his commercial grey mullet catch. Tane Zanders was fined \$1,500 for three charges under the Fisheries Act relating to false and misleading monthly harvest returns after pleading guilty in the Whangarei District Court last week. The vessel used in the offending was also forfeited to the Crown. Zanders was required to pay a further \$1,500 for the release of the vessel. Ministry for Primary Industries spokesman Stephen Rudsdale said this sort of offending is very disappointing. "The commercial fishing pressure on grey mullet in New Zealand's upper North Island has increased recently with catches approaching or even exceeding the total allowable commercial catch." Zanders' filed returns

were 931kg less than the actual catch.

A new report has painted a damning picture for the future of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, The New Zealand Herald reports. Written by the Hauraki Gulf Forum, the report said cumulative pressures on the sea are mounting as human population and commercial pressures escalate. It sets out 10 areas of concern, including from fish stocks, regulatory headaches and funding. "Native terrestrial species have been driven to extinction, native forests and vast wetlands have been cleared and replaced with pastoral land or urban development, water quality has been greatly reduced by contaminants and sediment, ecologically important marine habitats have been destroyed, fish populations have been greatly depleted, and te ao Māori (the world of Māori) has been ruptured," it said. [Read the report here.](#)

A group in Otago has asked the Fisheries Minister to close a section of coast north of Dunedin to pāua gathering, Otago Daily Times reports. East Otago Taiapure management committee chairman Brendan Flack said a scientific survey showed paua numbers in the area were declining. "If we don't do anything, in six years, we won't have to do anything because we won't have a paua fishery to manage. They will be gone," Mr Flack said.

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