



More efficient adjustments to catch limits

Fact sheet & FAQs

What? We're looking to streamline the process for setting catch limits for fish stocks. We propose doing this by making greater use of harvest control rules, which are pre-agreed responses to changes in fish stocks. We're also seeking feedback on ways to streamline other decisions we make to ensure the sustainability of our stocks, such as bag limits.

Why? Decisions on catch limits could be made more quickly, using the improved information from electronic reporting. This could be done in a way that better focuses on the long-term goals for fisheries. We're also aiming to be more responsive when setting other fisheries management controls that support our catch limits. These are currently altered through a lengthy regulatory process.

Proposals	Detail
Streamlining decision-making using harvest control rules	The proposal is to enable greater use harvest control rules to streamline and speed up the process for setting catch limits to respond more quickly to changes in fish stocks. The intention is to use this initially in commercial fisheries to adjust the total allowable commercial catch (TACC), where there is usually greater amounts of information available. The design of a harvest control rule will draw on stakeholder objectives, as well as the limits we use to evaluate fisheries that are below our benchmark for sustainability.
Streamlining management decisions to support catch limit adjustments	Regulation change by government is currently required to alter some fisheries management controls, such as setting bag limits, minimum legal sizes and fishing method, area and season. These can take over a year to implement, which is much slower than a change to a catch limit. The proposal is to review these controls to ensure they can quickly and effectively respond to changes within a fishery by using instruments, such as gazette notices. This approach is already used for some management controls and there is no obvious reason for requiring other changes by regulation.

FAQ's - Streamlining decision-making using harvest control rules

What's the issue?

Setting catch limits is one of the most important decisions we make to ensure the sustainable use of fish stocks. The current process to do this is relatively slow and resource intensive, which limits the number of stocks that Fisheries New Zealand can review each year. The transition to electronic catch and position reporting for commercial fishers will give us better and timelier information about the state of our fisheries, so we need a system that can respond more quickly. Fisheries New Zealand proposes using harvest control rules to allow for a more responsive process for setting these catch limits.

Why is the current system slow?

The current system for reviewing each total allowable catch limit (TAC) requires a lengthy process of:

- a comprehensive review of fisheries data as part of a public fish stock assessment process,
- a public consultation process, and
- a Ministerial decision on each total allowable catch limit.

Fisheries New Zealand has capacity to adjust between just 10 and 30 catch limits each year, which means most are done infrequently and with little certainty for fishers and other stakeholders.

How would harvest controls help?

Harvest control rules are a pre-agreed set of responses to a change in the health of a fish stock, and work by translating our science into a recommended catch limit. For example, if our science tells us that the stock has improved by a certain amount, then we can use the HCR to quickly calculate the amount that the catch limit can increase by.

How are harvest control rules used now?

Harvest control rules are used in most of New Zealand's rock lobster fisheries to guide the setting of TACs each year.

Are there any potential disadvantages to using harvest control rules?

We propose initially enabling HCRs to provide recommendations for the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) in fisheries that are mostly commercial. This is usually because there is a greater amount of information available from these fisheries, and limited competing demands of different sectors.

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How will the proposal improve the situation?

The proposal outlines our initial thinking on how other fisheries management controls are implemented when government intervention is required. We think that this process could be simplified by using Gazette notices rather than regulation changes. Gazette notices would provide a quicker response mechanism and are already used in a number of situations to specify management controls (for example, TACCs).