



Support for temporary fisheries closure for harvesting mussels, Ōhiwa Harbour, Bay of Plenty.

Stet Limited, 13 June 2024

About STET

STET is a social enterprise that supports restoration and conservation projects in New Zealand. Much of our paid, discounted and volunteer work is focused on improving the health of the Gulf. Clients for this work include the Department of Conservation, Auckland Council, the Hauraki Gulf Forum, and many community groups. We worked on the last four State of the Gulf reports.

Shaun Lee is one of the company directors, he is a diver and citizen scientist who does a lot of work with shorebirds and seabirds. He is also a trustee of the Mussel Reef Restoration Trust involved in the Revive Our Gulf project. He has not yet dived in Ōhiwa Harbour, but it is on his to-do list.

Supporting the application

We are writing to you today to express strong support for the proposed temporary fisheries closure at Ōhiwa Harbour in the Bay of Plenty. This closure has been thoughtfully requested by Te Runanga o Ngāti Awa under Section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996, as part of their commendable upcoming Rāhui (Te rāhui kuku ki tua o Kanawa). There may be other species of mussel in the harbour including *Mytilus* and *Atrina* species but due to the reo name of the project and restoration mahi in the harbour we are assuming it just applies to *Perna canaliculus*.

This initiative reflects a critical and timely intervention needed to address the ecological stresses facing our marine ecosystems. The areas in question have historically been rich in kuku /green-lipped mussels, which sustained cultural practices that date back generations. However, this century we have seen a stark decline in kuku due to overfishing of kuku and eleven-arm seastar predators, pollution, and habitat destruction. We support Ngāti Awa and neighbouring iwi in restoring these historic shellfish beds.

The proposed temporary closure of kuku harvesting would significantly bolster ongoing research efforts on mussel restoration in the harbour, led by Dr. Kura Paul-Burke. By limiting human predation, the closure would provide a controlled environment, allowing researchers to accurately assess the natural regeneration processes and the effectiveness of reseeded initiatives. This protected period would enable the collection of critical data on growth rates, survival, and habitat preferences of kuku, thereby informing best practices for future restoration projects. Such research is vital for developing sustainable management strategies that ensure the long-term health and abundance of mussel populations in the harbour.



Tōrea pango with kuku on Aotea / Great Barrier Island. Kuku are functionally extinct in this region. Photo Shaun Lee.

We are surprised by the small size of the proposed closure area and believe that expanding it could be more effective in managing poaching and enhancing the ecosystem services (like water cleaning) provided by hardworking shellfish. Several species of local manu that are going extinct will benefit from restored shellfish beds including tara / white-fronted tern, taranui / Caspian tern, tōrea / South Island pied oystercatcher and matuku moana / Pacific reef heron, nationally recovering populations of endemic variable oystercatcher / tōrea pango will also benefit. We appreciate the leadership of iwi in this initiative and encourage them to adopt a more ambitious approach that considers the full ecosystem functions in their marine protection efforts.

By embracing this proposal, Fisheries New Zealand would demonstrate a proactive and holistic approach to environmental stewardship, ensuring that our actions today contribute positively to the long-term sustainability and vitality of Ōhiwa Harbour.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

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