

## Support for the proposed temporary fishery closure and a netting ban at Tutukaka Harbour, Ngunguru Bay and Ngunguru River, Northland Stet Limited



A Nationally Vulnerable Reef heron / Matuku moana / *Egretta sacra* fishing in Tutukaka Harbour. Photo Shaun Lee.

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed temporary fishery closure and netting ban at Ngunguru Bay Northland, under section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996. The closure is designed to protect several species that have seen dramatic reductions in their populations due to overfishing. Recent surveys indicate that biodiversity degradation remains significant and further time is required for recovery.

The area (Rehuotane Ki Tai which covers Tutukaka Harbour, Ngunguru Bay, and Ngunguru River (Northland) and nearby areas) is a regionally significant biological hot spot. The species proposed for protection include Paua / Blackfoot and Yellowfoot, Koura / Red Rock lobster and Pack Horse Rock Lobster, Kutai / Mussels (all species), Manaia / Seahorse (all species), Whai / Stingray (all species), Ihe / Piper / Garish, all other Shellfish including Wheke / Octopus and Ngu / Squid. Many of these species have become functionally or locally extinct in Rehuotane Ki Tai over the last few decades. This is a great cause for concern, and it is essential that measures be taken to protect these species to restore ecosystem services. The temporary ban on all netting is necessary to ensure the success of the temporary closure because set nets are indiscriminate killing tools that can cause significant harm to non-target species.

There is a significant risk that if the area were to reopen now, it would be targeted by fishers perceiving the area has 'had a rest,' which would eliminate the progress made by nurseries over the last two years.

Protecting filter feeding animals, such as kūtai, will also help to reduce the impacts of pollution, including excess sedimentation. Restoring healthy marine populations and associated food webs will also support many shorebird species that feed in the estuary.



Most of these are threatened or at risk of extinction and feed on adult and juveniles of many of the species proposed for protection.

We note with concern the findings of the August 2024 kina barren survey, which recorded a noticeable absence of reef finfish and limited signs of repopulation in crayfish nurseries. This data underscores that the recovery process is in its early stages and the 'rest' provided by the 186a must not be interrupted.

We strongly support the proposed temporary fishery closure and netting ban at Ngunguru Bay Northland under section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996. Protecting these species is vital to maintaining healthy marine ecosystems and ensuring the survival of Threatened and At-Risk species. I urge you to take the necessary steps to implement these measures and protect these valuable species.

We support this extension as a necessary bridge to the proposed Mātaitai and associated bylaws. Allowing the 186a to lapse now would create a 'regulatory vacuum' and confusion for the community, potentially undoing the gains made since 2023.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

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