

Building the Future: Fishing



The health of our ocean matters to every New Zealander. It is part of who we are, provides us food, recreation, well-being, and a place for families and communities to connect.

For a family in Auckland, it might mean taking the tinny out from Half Moon Bay on a summer morning to try for a snapper. For a group of friends in Whakatāne or Gisborne, it might mean heading out to get a few kingis. For a fishing crew in Nelson, it's their job and their income.

Recreational fishing generates around \$1.7 billion of economic activity per year, the seafood industry's economic output is around \$6.4 billion per year, and the annual worth of the boating and marine industry is around \$3 billion.

We must strike the balance between environmental, recreational, customary and commercial interests and look after the long-term health of the whole ocean. We need to understand the asset, manage it well, and hand it on to future generations in better condition than we found it.

In the last three years we have passed the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025, the most significant expansion of marine protection in more than a decade. And we have delivered five new marine reserves as part of the South-East Marine Protection Network, Te Au Roa o Te Rākaihōia protecting 308 square kilometres of unique marine habitat and sea life.

We want fish stocks managed at healthy and abundant levels, not simply kept above minimum sustainability limits. Our decisions will be guided by the best available science, data and evidence, while upholding property rights and the Crown's Treaty settlement obligations.

A re-elected National Government will:

1. **Protect the Hauraki Gulf** – including a new Marine Reserve off Waiheke Island, further expand the Goat Island Marine Reserve, and banning commercial fishing in High Protection Areas.
2. **Support recreational fishers** – including ensuring fishers have a seat at the table in fishing reforms, and preventing the commercial sale of Marlin.
3. **Preserve our seamounts** – including reviewing bottom trawling with an aim to increase protections from 32% to 50% of our EEZ by 2040.
4. **Invest in innovation** – with a \$20 million Fish Tech Innovation Fund in partnership with the seafood sector.
5. **Take an inclusive and principled approach to fisheries management reform.**
6. **Ratify the High Seas Treaty in the next term of Government.**



1. Protecting the Hauraki Gulf

The Hauraki Gulf is loved by many Kiwis. It is a place to swim, boat and fish. It is also a vital hub for tourism, transport and commercial activity. It is central to Auckland's identity and way of life, and National understands the strength of that connection.

Since coming into Government, we have passed the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025, delivering the most significant expansion of marine protection in more than a decade by tripling marine protection. The Act recognises the Gulf's importance to mana whenua, recreational and commercial fishers, tourism operators and communities across the Auckland region. It expands two existing marine reserves, creates five new Seafloor Protection Areas and 12 new High Protection Areas.

The decision to allow bottom trawling in some designated trawl corridors in the Gulf has been controversial. While this has provided limited access to the commercial sector, the widespread concern of environmental groups and the recreational fishing population has not gone unheard. So, we will review that also. We believe a consistent approach to protection of the Gulf is best for all users and that removing exceptions to the original intent of the protections is needed.

We have invested in removing the kina barrens to help restore the kelp forests in the Hauraki Gulf, which are critical to a healthy ocean. National will build on these protections.

National believe the waters of the Gulf are best utilised by those who fish, dive, swim, or collect kaimoana recreationally. It is Auckland's playground and the centrepiece of some of New Zealand's most iconic aquatic events.

A re-elected National Party will:

- **Establish the Hākaimangō-Matiatia Marine Reserve off Waiheke Island**, a new 23.5km² marine protected area in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.
- **Further expand the size of the Goat Island / Te Hāwera-a-Maki Marine Reserve**, home to one of the most diverse marine habitats in the country and an educational, scientific and tourism hub with 350,000 visitors per year.
- **Ban commercial fishing in the Hauraki Gulf's High Protection Areas** by removing the exemptions for ringnet fishers.
- **Keep the ban on harvesting shellfish and marine species from rockpools** and continue to impose higher penalties and strict enforcement. National will keep this ban in place as long as necessary for these ecosystems to recover and won't support it being removed before then.
- **Develop a sustainable fisheries plan in the wider Hauraki Gulf Marine Park** in partnership with industry and interested stakeholders, review bottom trawling corridors, incorporating new innovation and methodologies and updated environmental biomass data.





2. Supporting recreational fishers

Enjoying time on the water and catching a feed is part of what makes us Kiwis. At least 600,000 New Zealanders fish recreationally, now and then. We are fortunate to have a charter fishing industry that drives local coastal economies, provides expert access to deep-water fishing grounds, and makes recreational boating accessible to everyday kiwis and our tourists.

Too often we only identify serious problems once a stock has already declined to a level where drastic restrictions are required. National will work with the wider fishing sector to investigate how we can improve fisheries data in New Zealand. A more proactive management system would mean that emerging stock pressures should be identified earlier, and management responses occur sooner. As a result, fish stocks will remain healthy and productive for future generations. Better information would mean less risk of stock collapse, and more certainty for recreational fishers, commercial operators, iwi and our coastal communities.

National will protect the marine environment so it keeps providing for recreational sport and customary fishers.

A re-elected National Party will:

- **Rule out a licence for recreational sea fishing.** Fishing for a feed is a Kiwi right. We will not introduce or require a licence or permit for recreational fishing in the sea. Existing licences for freshwater sports fish are not affected.
- **Support the Billfish Accord.** National will prevent the commercial sale of Marlin, so it stays as a world-class sport fishery.
- **Increase penalties and enforcement, including instant fines for those exceeding catch limits.** If we want our fish to be there for our children and grandchildren, we all need to take only what we need and stick to the limits. Those who don't follow the rules – no matter whether customary, recreational or commercial – should face consequences.
- **National will increase Honorary Fisheries Officers to 200** to crack down on illegal fishing and strengthen patrols and targeted enforcement to catch offenders and protect our fisheries. Higher fines reinvested into their monitoring and enforcement training programs.

Honorary Fishery Officers have similar powers to paid fishery officers, including the authority to search, question and seize. They also help educate recreational fishers about the rules. Most spend more than 100 hours a year in the role, and together they complete between 11,000 to 14,000 inspections each year, around 40 percent of recreational compliance work.

3. Protecting our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and seamounts

There are over 1,900 seamounts and seamount-like features in New Zealand's EEZ waters. They support diverse ecosystems and rare species such as stony corals, black corals, gorgonian corals and hydrocorals. Over 70,000 people signed the Live Ocean petition calling for greater protection for seamounts. National will act to protect more of these biodiversity hotspots in our EEZ through a targeted, balanced and science-led approach.

Spatial management measures will seek to protect habitats and ecological values that are vulnerable, while avoiding unnecessary impacts on the value of the existing fishing catch, and the Crown's Treaty settlement obligations with regard to the Fisheries Settlement. Our proposed approach will retain the flexibility to review settings as scientific understanding, environmental conditions and fisheries change over time rather than applying a blanket ban.

Transparent, reliable data is essential to public confidence in how much fish is harvested and how our fisheries are managed. We must balance commercial,

recreational and customary interests while protecting this shared resource for future generations. Commercial fishing is a significant contributor to New Zealand's economy, earning close to \$2 billion in exports each year and supporting 9000 jobs and incomes in regional communities.

A re-elected National Party will:

- **Increase protection of the EEZ and preserve of our seamounts** with an aim to increase protected areas from 32% to 50% by 2040.
- **Prioritise vulnerable corals and seamounts** for protection based on a balanced and science-led approach.
- **Uphold the Crown's Treaty fisheries settlement obligations.**

Seamounts and seamount-like features include seamounts defined as submarine features greater than 1000m in height from base to peak, as well as other submarine features, such as underwater mounts of lesser elevations, including hills, knolls, banks, rises and peaks along oceanic ridge systems greater than 100m in height.



4. \$20 million Fish Tech Innovation Fund

Commercial fishing is an important part of New Zealand’s economy. It supports thousands of jobs in coastal communities and provides high-quality, locally caught seafood for New Zealanders and export markets alike, with close to \$2 billion in annual export earnings. While some people catch their own fish, most New Zealanders enjoy seafood from their local supermarket or fish and chip shop. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of our fisheries is critical for both coastal communities and consumers.

Mitigation technology, properly designed and properly adopted, can change outcomes. There is good evidence this approach works. Since 1 October 2024, New Zealand’s surface longline vessels have been required to use hook-shielding devices or the “three out of three” seabird mitigation measures: tori lines, setting lines at night, and weighted lines. Seabird captures across all fishing methods fell to 505 in the third quarter of 2025–26, down from 767 in the same period a year earlier.

National will establish the Fish Tech Innovation Fund in partnership with the seafood sector, matching dollar-for-dollar any investment from the sector, up to \$10 million.

The Fund will be targeted towards better fishing gear and practices, including reducing the impact of bottom trawling. It will also target science and research into biomass data to improve the responsiveness of the Quota Management System.

By backing science and innovation and working with the sector, we can improve environmental outcomes while supporting a sustainable and productive fishing industry.

Fish Tech Innovation Fund	
Total fund	\$20 million
Government	\$10 million over four years (from the Primary Sector Growth Fund)
Seafood sector	\$10 million, matched dollar for dollar
Focus	Better fishing gear and methods, aiming for less seabed contact and less bycatch

A re-elected National Party will:

- **Establish a \$20 million Fish Tech Innovation Fund with the seafood sector** to support new innovation that reduces seabed contact and protects sensitive habitats.





5. Sensible fisheries management reforms

National will deliver better ecosystem outcomes through fisheries law reform by making sure our legislation has the confidence of New Zealanders. Fisheries management and the Quota Management System must be fit for purpose and effective in a changing climate.

National will convene a multi-stakeholder forum to properly examine and test all aspects of the proposed Fisheries Amendment Bill in order to achieve a balanced and acceptable package of fisheries reform legislation.

National support the following principles for any fisheries reform:

- **Transparent data is critical** to building community trust in how much we harvest and how we manage our fisheries.
- **Improving the effectiveness of the Quota Management System** should be central to the reforms.
- **Commercial and recreational interests must be balanced** in a way that protects this asset for those who come after us.

6. High Seas Treaty and International Agreements

Many of the fish stocks we depend on move across national boundaries and into the high seas. That gives New Zealand a strong interest in international fisheries agreements that work.

The High Seas Treaty, formally the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), came into force on 17 January 2026. It makes it possible to set up marine protected areas in the high seas, regulate the use of marine genetic resources, and assess the environmental impact of current and future human activity.

So far 103 Parties have ratified the Agreement and 145 countries have signed it. New Zealand has signed but not yet ratified. A re-elected National Party would ratify it.

A re-elected National Party will:

- **Ratify the High Seas Treaty** in the next term of Government.