

Chris Hipkins confirms bottom trawling restrictions in Hauraki Gulf and tripling of marine protection areas

By [Bernard Orsman](#)

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Prime Minister Chris Hipkins confirmed this morning the Government will restrict bottom trawling in the Hauraki Gulf and nearly triple the area under protection.

Establishing new marine protection areas and a ban on the controversial fishing method are a major step towards protecting the Hauraki Gulf for future generations, Hipkins said in Auckland.

“The Hauraki Gulf - Tikapa Moana – is an absolute treasure and needs to be protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

“The gulf, however, is at risk and its ecosystems are under immense pressures, causing concerning declines in marine life and sea bird populations. Those who live and work in the Gulf can see it’s changing. There’s more pollution and fewer birds.

“We know action is needed now. Today’s announcement follows years of careful work and extensive consultation, and strikes a good balance,” he said.

Asked why the Government has not banned bottom trawling altogether in the Hauraki Gulf, Hipkins said the wider issue of banning bottom trawling was not off the table in the future.

The Prime Minister said the impact on recreational fishing will be relatively small.

A report on the process leading to today’s announcement said 9.6 per cent of recreational fishing occurs in the high protection, based on data from the 2017-2018 fishing years.

Hipkins was joined by Conservation Minister Willow-Jean Prime and Oceans and Fisheries Minister Rachel Brooking to announce significant new marine protections.

The Government plans to introduce the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Bill into Parliament before the House rises, nearly tripling the total area under protection in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park from just over 6 per cent to about 18 per cent.

The Bill includes:

5th) ending the country’s first marine reserve, Cape Rodney – Okakari Pt Marine Reserve (Goat Island) and Ngānui A Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve, on the Coromandel Peninsula

- Creating 12 new high protection areas to protect and restore marine ecosystems, while allowing for customary practices of tangata whenua.
- Five new seafloor protection areas to preserve sensitive seafloor habitats by prohibiting bottom-contact fishing methods and other activities that harm the seafloor.

Hipkins envisaged the bill would become law early next year.

Bottom trawling involves dragging weighted nets over the seafloor to catch fish and is often favoured by commercial fishing companies as it can catch large quantities in one go.

Prime said the best way to protect the special marine ecosystem is to find conservation solutions that work for everyone – “and that’s exactly what this action to revitalise the gulf does”.

“A new marine protection tool, the high protection area, will recognise kaitiakitanga and cultural practices of tangata whenua while also meeting strong conservation outcomes.”

More than 7500 submissions were received on the marine protection proposals at the end of last year, and more than 10,000 on the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan.

“We’ve heard the community call for marine protection. Sustained action now is critical to ensuring we can continue to share stories of Hauraki’s abundance,” Prime said.

Brooking said the recently approved Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan was the first of its kind.

“Historically, we’ve treated each fish stock as separate, but they’re not,” she said.

“Species like snapper, kingfish, and kahawai all live together in the gulf and are affected by local conditions, by the things humans do, and by environmental factors such as climate change.

“The Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan is the first fisheries plan which takes an ecosystems-based approach and is the first one tailored for a specific area. This is a significant move to protect a very special fishery into the future,” Brooking said.

The Green Party welcomed the “long overdue” protection of the Hauraki Gulf with oceans and fisheries spokesperson Eugenie Sage saying successive governments have allowed overfishing, sediment pollution, and destructive fishing practices to degrade the health of the Gulf, despite repeated calls and pressure from the community and mana whenua for change.

“Our biggest disappointment is that this has come so late in the term. It is good to see a commitment to introduce legislation to establish these new protected areas, but very disappointing it won’t become law before the election,” she said.

Sage said Aotearoa is still woefully behind in marine protection.

“We are not doing anywhere near enough to control the impacts of industrial fishing. The clock is ticking and we’re at risk of losing precious habitats forever,” she said.