



**SPECIAL  
EDITION**  
August 2021

# Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua

## Assessing the impacts of recreational fishing in Fiordland

In February 2020, we launched an online survey for people who fish recreationally in the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA), focusing on the sustainability of fisheries, mostly within the fiords.

Over 200 people responded, contributing valuable knowledge and accounts of fishing in the FMA to our ongoing assessment of fisheries sustainability for Fiordland and the wider fishing experience.

The full results of this survey are available on our website at [fmg.org.nz](http://fmg.org.nz). Here we share a summary of the results and highlight what we have found most informative as we look to the future of fishing in the FMA.

Patterns and trends in how the FMA is fished, what is caught and where will help us establish the best approach for rebuilding depleted fish stocks in Fiordland.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and feedback.

## Background

Recreational fishers are one of several key user groups that regularly spend time in the FMA. The Fiordland Marine Guardian's renewed focus on recreational fishing stems from concerns about the serial depletion of fisheries within the inner fiords where commercial fishing has been excluded since 2005 under the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act.

In 2019 we became increasingly concerned about the future sustainability of finfish stocks, particularly within the southern fiords. In other words, areas that are only fished recreationally and have been more costly and difficult to reach.

Our own fishing experiences in the FMA and the concerns expressed by charter operators and other people who fished the fiords led us to review the current recreational fishing regulations for the FMA.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are guided by the vision that the quality of Fiordland's marine environment and fisheries, including the wider fishery experience, be maintained or improved for future generations to use and enjoy.

The principle of 'gifts and gains' is embedded into the provisions of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005. In the process of developing an integrated strategy for the FMA, when one interest or sector benefited at the cost of another, the advantaged party agreed to give something in return. The aim was to ensure that the greater good of Fiordland takes precedence over competing interests. Recreational fishers volunteered to set stringent fishing rules for the more fragile inner fiords and commercial fishers withdrew from fishing these areas. In addition, a self-imposed rāhui on customary authorisations was placed on the inner fiords by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

## Listening to fishers

Starting in late 2019, we engaged with fishers to increase our understanding of:

**the current state of fish stocks**

**observing trends from regular users of the FMA**

**what peoples' fishing experiences were like, and**

**what best solutions could be implemented to manage the expected increase in visitors to Fiordland and their effects on fish populations.**

At the same time, we reviewed the available fisheries data for the FMA. Because recreational fishers are not required to report their catch, we knew there would be some critical information gaps.

## Our engagement

We engaged face-to-face with fishers via:

- Tangata Tiaki hui with the southern Papatipu Rūnanga
- focus groups for amateur-fishing charter vessel (ACV) operators and independent fishers
- attendees at boat shows in Southland and Otago.

In early 2021 we engaged more widely and asked anyone who fishes in the FMA to participate in an online survey. The Fiordland Marine Guardians designed the survey with support from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, who undertook the work on our behalf.

We asked fishers about fisheries sustainability, the current health of recreational fish stocks, and their overall fishing experience in the FMA.

We now have a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of different fisheries within the FMA and what people's experiences are on and under the water when fishing and gathering kai moana in Fiordland.



**87%**  
Stay onboard during fishing trips\*

**20%**  
Use DoC huts\*

**12%**

stay in Milford Township\*

**11%**

stay in Deep Cove Hostel\*

\*Respondents could choose multiple places where they stay while on fishing trips.



**81%**  
Use private power boat

**61%**  
Visiting regularly in at least two locations

**29%**  
Visit once a year

**29%**  
Visit every 3 - 6 months

**56%**  
Visiting the FMA for more than 15 years

# What we heard about the current state of fishing in Fiordland

Respondents' attitudes towards the current state of fishing in the FMA are relatively positive; however, those that have a longer history in the place are less optimistic than those who have been visiting for a lesser time.

How would you rate the overall fishing in the FMA at present?

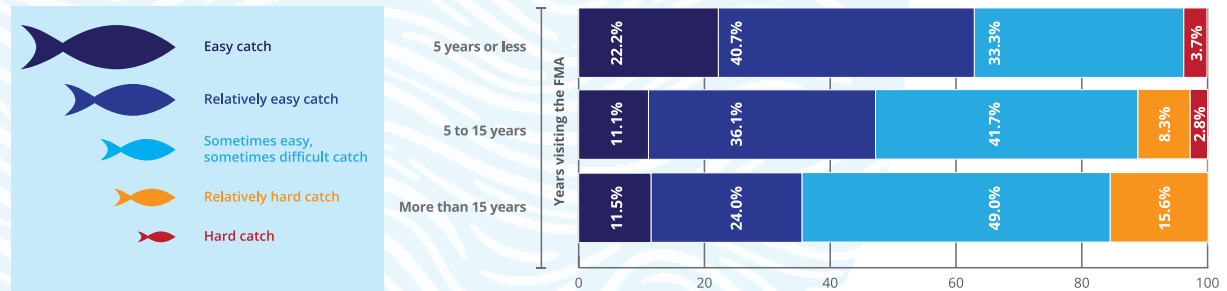


Figure 1. Rating of the overall fishing in the FMA, by how long the respondent has been visiting the FMA.

More respondents feel that it is taking them longer to catch fish in general (41% strongly agree or agree) than those who do not think it is taking them longer (31% strongly disagree or disagree).

I am finding it takes longer to catch fish in general

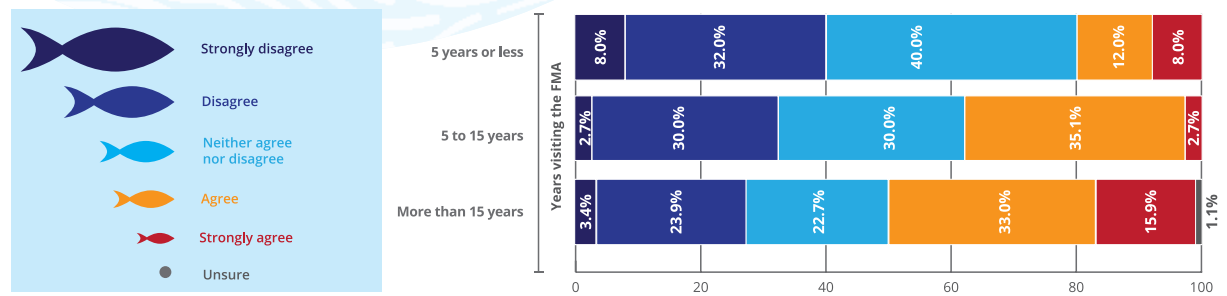


Figure 2. Level of agreement with the statement 'I am finding it takes longer to catch fish in general' by how long respondents have been visiting the FMA.

Half of the respondents (50%) do not think it has become easier to catch fish inside the habitat lines, while 34% neither agree nor disagree that it has become easier, 8% think it has become easier to catch fish inside the habitat lines and 7% are unsure. Those with a longer history in Fiordland feel this more strongly.

It has become easier to catch fish inside the habitat lines (in the fiords)

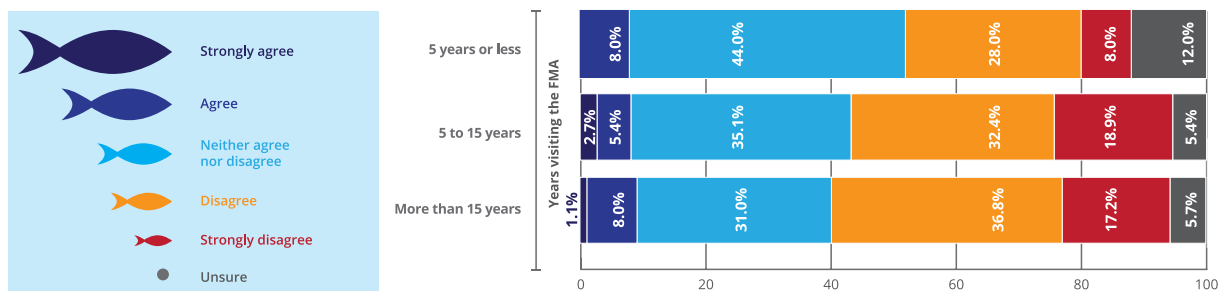


Figure 3. Level of agreement with the statement 'It has become easier to catch fish inside the habitat lines (in the fiords)' by how long the respondents have been visiting the FMA.

# Messages we have received loud and clear

People also generously shared their thoughts and specific concerns with us at the hui, at The Rock Boat Show Southland in 2020 and as part of the survey.

There are some strong themes emerging.

There seems to be an increasing demand on the fisheries over time, with more recreational boats out fishing than ever before.

People are concerned about fisheries declining inside the fiords.

Recreational fishers value fishing at the entrance to Milford Sound Piopiotahi, and this place is under pressure.

Hāpuku / groper are a lot harder to catch than they used to be.

People are finding it harder to catch rawaru / blue cod than they used to, particularly at popular fishing spots.

There are reports of crayfish being plentiful.

People are relatively optimistic about the future of recreational fishing in the short-to-medium term but are uncertain about the long-term future of fishing in the FMA.

An overwhelming majority of people would be willing to use an app to report their catch.

# What we're doing about it

Already we see progress in Fiordland because of this work. But we're not done yet!

- Charter operators have developed a Code of Conduct that promotes fishing for a feed (taking less than the legal recreational bag limits) and is gentler on the vulnerable stocks inside the fiords.
- Fish Mainland is developing a recreational fishing reporting app, which will empower the sector with robust data. This app will be trialled in Fiordland later this year.
- Fisheries NZ are developing electronic reporting for charter vessels that will improve the accuracy and efficiency of their reporting requirements.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians have concerns about the future of recreational fishing in Fiordland. Individual Guardians that have a long history with Fiordland, have witnessed first hand the decline of many stocks. We're worried that as the place continues to get busier and the overall fishing

effort increases, more fish (and crayfish, shellfish etc.) will be harvested than the ecosystem can produce.

As Fiordland Marine Guardians, we are mandated under the Act to ensure "That the quality of Fiordland's marine environment and fisheries, including the wider fishery experience, be maintained or improved for future generations to use and enjoy." Therefore, it is our responsibility to advocate for measures that will rebuild fish stocks impacted by overfishing.

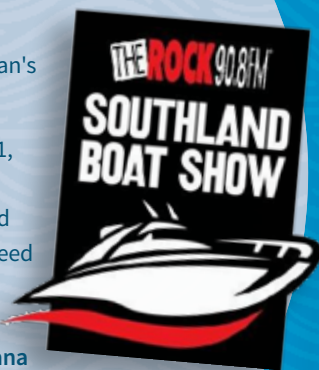
Now, our job is to evaluate the survey results alongside outputs from face-to-face hui (Tangata Tiaki, ACV operators, independent fishers) and the available fisheries science data. We will identify and describe the key fisheries issues for the FMA, with a horizon well beyond the next 20+ years, and provide recommendations to the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries, Hon. David Parker in the coming months.

**Stay up-to-date**  
on this important work!  
If you would like to receive a copy of the Fisheries Sustainability Survey Report, please email [info@fmg.org.nz](mailto:info@fmg.org.nz).

## Come and have a yarn with us at Southland's next boat show

Look out for the Fiordland Marine Guardian's stand at The Rock Southland Boat Show.

Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th August 2021, ILLT Stadium, Invercargill. Come and have a chat with us about the FMA, our role and the work we do, and the issues you feel need attention. Take home a copy of the latest edition of **Beneath the Reflections** – A user's guide to the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area and be in to win one of several stunning books we are giving away over the weekend.



## Keeping in touch

As always, the Guardians will work hard to facilitate community-led, proactive approaches that are informed by the best scientific and anecdotal information available. We place a high value on the experiences and knowledge of the Fiordland community and encourage you to share your thoughts with us.

Our website [fmg.org.nz](http://fmg.org.nz) is based on the content and layout of the User Guide: Beneath the Reflections and provides helpful and informative information for those wanting to get out on the water.

You can email us at [info@fmg.org.nz](mailto:info@fmg.org.nz)